

No. 149. Vol. 6.

Week Ending March 18th, 1922.

The School Friend

Every

2^d

Thursday.



IS MABS TO BLAME ?

A dramatic incident from the magnificent story of the girls of Cliff House School, contained in this issue.

"DECEIVING THE SCHOOL!" | "JOAN HAVILAND'S SILENCE!"

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of the Girls of Cliff House.

An Enthralling Serial of Life at Greyhurst School.

Extracts from the **"Cliff House Weekly!"**



Your Editor's Corner.



Write to me as often as you like and let me know what you think of "The School Friend." All readers who write me, and enclose a stamped envelope, may be sure of receiving a prompt reply by post. All letters should be addressed: The Editor, "The School Friend," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

My Dear Readers,—In last week's story Mabel Lynn indeed proved herself to be a girl of sterling character. She resolved that she would bring to book the girl for whose mean trick she had been given the blame, and she has not spared herself in any way in order to fulfil this resolve. But, as this week's story shows, fortune has not served Mabs quite so well as she deserves. How lucky it was for Lorna Manton that just as at least one misdeed of hers was to be revealed, Mabs and her chums should be quarantined in Friardale! I know the questions that will be uppermost in your minds whilst you look forward to next Thursday's magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Cliff House, entitled:

"THE GIRL ON THE FARM!"

By Hilda Richards.

How long will Babs, Mabs, and Bessie be obliged to remain in Friardale? Have we heard the last of Aunt Tilly? And, seeing the above title, you will wonder—who is the girl on the farm? I shall not spoil your interest in the coming splendid story if I answer the last question for you. The girl on the farm is Lorna Manton, and you will see her in a surprisingly new light. As to whether this light will prove favourable or unfavourable, and what causes Lorna Manton to work on a farm, you will learn next week. Suffice to say, this story is as exciting as any you have ever read.

You will see that the serial you have all enjoyed,

"JOAN HAVILAND'S SILENCE!"

By Joy Phillips,

finishes this week. I am sure you have all voted this a worthy successor to "The Girl Who Chose Riches," and found it even more enthralling. Not only Joan, Elsie, and Hilda, but Ruby Haviland will have found a permanent place in your hearts with the finish of the story.

And what will replace the serial next week? For one week only a grand long complete story of

THE GIRLS OF DANESFORD HALL!

will appear. We do not hear so much of this popular rival school as we should

like, and we are always glad to learn what is going on there. Thus you will thoroughly enjoy this grand complete story of *Gertie Thomas & Co.*

There will also be numerous and varied extracts from

THE CLIFF HOUSE WEEKLY!

But this is not by any means all I have to tell you. I have already promised an important announcement concerning this little paper, and here it is. The week after next the "Cliff House Weekly" will appear in a

SPLENDID NEW FORM!

It will consist of no less than

EIGHT PAGES,

and four of these pages will be occupied by an

ENTHRALLING NEW SERIAL!

I could scarcely publish better news than this. All kinds of bright, novel features will be found in the new "Cliff House Weekly." Popular as has been the "Weekly" all along in "extract" form, I am confident that it will prove all the more popular in its new form. Fuller particulars will be given next week, when you will be told the title of our splendid new serial.

BRIEF REPLIES.

(Owing to the fact that we go to press considerably in advance of publication, readers should bear in mind that letters cannot be answered on this page within six weeks from the date of receipt.)

"A Madcap Schoolgirl" (Highams Park). I cannot promise more "barring-out" stories. There is a good deal of probability that, in the future, the girls of Cliff House and Morcove schools will meet. I will bear in mind your suggestions.

"Babs and Mabs" (Edinburgh).—Peggy Preston is described in the Information Number of the "Cliff House Weekly" as possessing "light brown curly hair and clear blue eyes." I will answer your other question in full if you will let me know your name and address.

"Bluebell" (Reading).—Let me know your name and address, and I will reply to your questions in full.

"A B C" (Hebden Bridge, Yorks).—Yes, Marjorie Hazeldene is the sister of the boy you mention. I will reply in full to your other question if you will send me your name and address.

"Bob" (Watford).—The birthdays of the girls may be published in the SCHOOL FRIEND later. I regret that I cannot introduce into the stories girls of the names and descriptions you suggest, on account of the number of requests of a similar nature that are made to me.

Misses P. Welch and K. Penny (New Malden).—I cannot promise to accede to your request. Yes, there is a good deal of probability that the girls of Cliff House and Morcove Schools will meet in the future.

"Chatterbox."—No; at your age, ten years, you are not by any means too young to read the SCHOOL FRIEND, as I have readers younger as well as older than yourself. See reply immediately above. I will see if Stella Stone cannot be given a prominent part in a coming story or series of stories.

"Midge" (Langley).—I was very interested to learn which characters are your favourites. Midge Minden is the best singer at Morcove School.

"Inquisitive" (South Africa).—Sheba Stanton is fifteen years of age. Thanks for your good work in obtaining new readers for the SCHOOL FRIEND.

"Tomboy" (Kensington).—Bridget O'Toole will most probably take prominent parts in coming stories. No, I do not edit the papers you mention. Barbara Redfern is in no way related to the boy you name. I will keep in mind your numerous suggestions.

"Diana" (Brighton).—Cissy Clare is the most delicate in the Fourth Form. I will pass on your suggestion to Miss Richards.

"A Reader of the SCHOOL FRIEND," and Miss Ivy Cast.—You will have seen before this that the result of the recent competition has already been published.

"Brighton High School Girl."—Glad you like the stories of the Fourth Form parliament so much. Only the future can answer your question concerning Betty Barton & Co.

"Fair Play."—I am afraid I cannot quite see eye to eye with you in your criticisms.

Your Sincere Friend,

YOUR EDITOR.

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when replying to Advertisements.

Deceiving the School!



A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of the Girls of Cliff House and the Girls from Oakvale House School, featuring Mabel Lynn and Lorna Manton.

By HILDA RICHARDS.

Lorna Manton's Daring Idea!

"SSSSSH, Bertha! Here!" Bertha Breton saw the girl who gave that warning whisper, saw the finger laid on her lips to enjoin silence, and crept silently in Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage at Cliff House School.

"What's the matter, Marie?" she muttered.

Marie Tate-Graham, a thin-faced girl with pointed features and a shallow chin, gave her red-haired companion a warning glance. At a fresh step in the passage she darted back to the door again.

"Alma! Here!"

Cheery voices coming from a study further along the passage almost drowned her cautious utterance. But the rosy-cheeked, swaggering girl saw, and came to Study No. 5.

"What's the—"

"Ssssssh!" warned the cautious Marie. "Wait! Listen! I'll explain in a minute!"

There were more footsteps; this time Marie ushered in two girls.

Five of them now, and Marie seemed satisfied. She pushed the door to until it was almost closed, then placed her foot against it so that no puff of wind should blow it open to reveal their presence.

"Whatever have you got in your mind?" whispered Bertha Breton.

"Wait! You'll hear something in a moment!" Marie answered in a quivering voice. "My goodness! We're nearly found out!"

And that statement caused such a sensation in the study that Bertha instantly lost any irritation she had shown and looked quite alarmed.

They were not really Cliff House girls, these five. Eight of them had come from Oakvale House School for a short period while structural alterations were carried out at the closed school. Three girls had settled down, but these five had, by their actions, made themselves anything but popular with the Fourth.

"They won't know we've come up yet," Marie muttered, after a pause. "They may not say much more, but I've heard enough."

Again they exchanged glances that were certainly apprehensive. But just at that moment a cheery cry echoed along the passage.

"The Fifth are going down, girls! Get your hockey-sticks and come along! We haven't much time, so we'd better not keep the match waiting."

Just for a second Bertha Breton ventured to peep through the crack of the door. She saw several doors opening, and girls dressed for hockey emerged, carrying their sticks.

"Right-ho, Babs!"

"Coming!"

Two or three passed the study, optimistically forecasting the sort of defeat they hoped to inflict on their old rivals of the Fifth Form. Then other voices penetrated to the five girls who hid, unsuspected, behind the door of Study No. 5. The voices were in a lower key, and were far more serious in tone.

"As soon as we've had tea, Clara."

"Trust me!" came a confident answer.

"I know Bertha & Co. have got a pass to go out again this evening. Their chum will try and go with them. And now we know she's hiding in the old tower—"

"Ssssssh! Not so loud, in case anyone hears!"

"But we'll catch her to-night—in an hour or so from now, I hope!" said a fresh voice, that trembled with a strange intensity of feeling. "I'll face Lorna Manton once and for all! I'll make her confess to what she did—"

The voice died away and became just a murmur. The five girls in Study No. 5 were very pale.

"You heard it?" whispered Marie.

"Yes, and it was that Mabel Lynn who was talking!" Bertha Breton answered. "She's the most dangerous of any!"

"But we can understand why," muttered the affected voice of Alma Wright. "It isn't remarkable, considering that she was accused of japing all the people at the Courtfield Baby Show, and damaging a silver cup that's going to cost five-pounds-ten to repair—"

"Don't harp on it!" interrupted Bertha, with sulky snappishness. "Lorna Manton, our chum, did it. We all know that. She ran away, and Mabel Lynn was mistaken for her; and that's why Lorna didn't dare to come here with us. But it was a good jape—I don't care what anyone says!"

"They're such little prigs here!" shivered Marie Tate-Graham. "I just heard a scrap when I came up—that's what put me on my guard. They saw through what happened this morning when Laura gave that yell in the tower. But what a good thing I've managed to find out, when we thought ourselves so safe!"

Bertha crossed agitatedly to the window, and saw the hockey players streaming across the quadrangle.

"Thank goodness all the interfering ones—Babs and Mabs and Clara and Flap and Phyllis—are all going to amuse themselves playing hockey!" she muttered. "Whew! How they're looking up at the tower!"

"Lorna will never be such an idiot as to show herself!" quavered Marie.

"No, I don't think so," said Bertha. "But we've got to do something at once, girls—yes, at once! We must see Lorna while we can!"

Without thinking another word about the tea that they had come to get now that Friday's lessons were over, Bertha ran down the stairs, the others following her. At the lodge by the gates she met the porter and asked for the key of the tower.

"I thought you'd seen that 'orrible, ghostly thing in there, miss," Piper objected. "Scared me the other night, it did, with its awful moaning—"

"Oh, we sha'n't be scared!" Bertha answered, in her haughty way.

It was not until they had swung open the creaking door of the circular clock-tower in the quadrangle that Bertha spoke again.

"Had to get the key as a matter of form," she said. "Lorna's had a duplicate made now, of course. I don't suppose they guess that!"

"We can't say that they don't guess anything," said Marie nervously. "Oh dear! I don't know what Lorna's going to do."

There was one empty room on the ground level. They went through that, after closing the door, and ascended the stairs. Another single room they passed, and came to the top floor, a room filled chiefly with the mechanism of the clock and the winding apparatus.

A room just as bare as the others! That morning it had baffled all the Cliff House girls. But Bertha & Co. knew its secret!

"All clear?" whispered Bertha. She crossed to what looked like a solid stretch of the old wall and tapped on it with a pencil. "Lorna, Lorna!" she called cautiously.

There was a sort of click. Part of the solid wall moved slowly inwards.

A girl stood before them.

"Hallo, girls!" said Lorna Manton cheerily. "Come to see the ghost of the tower? Hope that jolly old porter's got over his shock! Ha, ha, ha!"

But Bertha Breton could not smile; she was too worried.

"Lorna, it's no good," she said. "This place isn't as secret as you thought. Through shrieking this morning as you did—"

"Shrieking!" ejaculated Lorna. "Who wouldn't have shrieked when the wall dived backwards? I nearly fell down those horrid stairs; only just saved myself. The spring is right at the bottom, and you have to kick that brick with your foot. I must have been doing it. Whoever will think of kicking—"

"You don't let me get a word in edge-ways!" Bertha cried. "They've guessed who you are, and why you're here! Mabel Lynn's going to catch you!"

"Eh?" said Lorna, startled. "Catch me? How? When?"

"We've only just found out. They were going to wait in hiding round the

tower, and jump on you as you came out to join us to-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The five girls stared speechlessly at the chuckling Lorna.

"Have you quite taken leave of your senses?" exclaimed Bertha. "Here we are, worrying every minute of the day about what's going to happen to you next, and—"

"My dear kid, don't you think I ever do any thinking?" cried Lorna. "As a matter of fact, I'm fed-up with being in this dingy old place without any lights. 'Tisn't worth it! I've already decided to quit this desirable residence as soon as possible. I've a much better idea! Know what I'm going to do?"

"No," said Bertha vaguely.

"I'm going to be your aunt, Bertha!"

"My—my aunt!" gasped Bertha.

"Don't make puns! Yes, your dear, darling, devoted aunt!"

Bertha stared at her.

"You're talking in riddles! How—how ever can you be—"

"Ever heard of your Aunt Tilly?" asked Lorna blandly.

"Of course not!"

"Then you will, soon! She's coming to see you at Cliff House—straight from South Africa!" Lorna gave them an elaborate bow. "Behold your Aunt Tilly, Bertha!"

Bertha Breton gasped.

"What? You're going to dress up and pretend—"

"Disguise, of course!" laughed Lorna Manton. "Why not? I ought to have thought of it at first! It'll get over all our troubles. As your dear Aunt Tilly

I can go out with you without being in any danger of being chased all round the village. I sha'n't have to stop in the tower and drag all my bedding and bags on to this secret staircase as soon as anyone comes to the place. It's the idea of a lifetime, my dears, and I'm the one to carry it out!"

Bertha & Co. gazed at her, their eyes shining.

"It'll be no end of a score off those others!" Bertha murmured. "Of course, it's a bit risky!"

"Not how I shall do it!" Lorna answered confidently. She laughed again. "Ha, ha, ha! No possible danger at all, my chickens! It'll be as easy as falling off the top of this stupid old tower!"

And Lorna went on with quick, enthusiastic details.

None of them raised objections now. There were minor details, like getting the necessary clothing and disguise from a theatrical shop in Courtfield, but Lorna was confident that she would be able to arrange anything like that.

"And I'm going to get away out of this silly old tower now!" she finished.

"I've had enough of it, I can tell you. I'll dress up and come back to-night. No need for us to waste the precious evenings, is there?"

"But can you get us all out?" said Bertha doubtfully.

"Leave that to Aunt Tilly," said Lorna cheerfully. "Aunt Tilly will know how to be persuasive! Now, can I get away at once?"

"At once!" they said, startled.

"Yes; why not? No one will expect me to walk out of the gates in broad

daylight. One of you lend me a hat—Olivia's will fit best, I think. Olivia can just make her way into the school, and we five will stroll to the gate."

"It's a bit daring," said Bertha.

"Yes, but I've got to get out some way! Lead on, Macduff—Olivia, give me your hat! That's right. Now it's full steam for Courtfield!"

Some of them felt slightly apprehensive as they crossed the quadrangle, but there was too much interest in the hockey game between the Fourth and Fifth for anyone to give them more than passing notice. They reached the gates, Lorna hanging back, and Piper went inside to return the key to its hook. While he was gone, they all walked into the lane.

"Ha, ha! Done it!" chortled Lorna Manton softly. "I'm off now, girls! Cheerio! Expect to see me back as soon as possible; and don't forget to make a real fuss of Aunt Tilly when she comes!"

And Lorna Manton walked swiftly away, to accomplish the first part of what was destined to prove one of the greatest deceptions ever practised at Cliff House School!

Not Prepared to Own Up!

"NOT a word!" The heavy clouds had brought an early dusk that evening, a rather gratifying state of affairs to the Fourth Formers.

Barbara Redfern & Co. had gathered in the passage after tea that evening.

"Lorna won't have left the tower yet," Babs whispered. "It hasn't been dark enough. The others have gone out, and she'll join them as soon as possible."

Mabel Lynn tugged at her chum's arm.

"Come on, Babs—now!" she urged. "Let's creep across the quadrangle and hide behind those bushes as soon as possible. To think that we're really going to catch Lorna Manton now! Oh, it seems too good to be true!"

Babs led the way downstairs. Babs understood. Her chum wanted to clear her name of the slur that Lorna's action had cast on it. It mean a lot to Mabs.

"I say, you girls," squeaked the excited voice of Bessie Bunter, "supposing we see the old gig-gig-ghost of the tower!"

"There's never been a ghost," said Babs quickly. "That was Lorna dressed up in a sheet. We all know it now."

"Quite so. But a—another old gig-gig-ghost may have turned up by now," said Bessie doubtfully.

"Don't get such thoughts in your head, Bessie," said Babs. "Fancy saying such stupid things! Come on, and don't chatter!"

They trooped out into the quadrangle, moving now with the utmost caution.

It grew darker as they crept nearer and nearer to the tower. The few bushes at the top of the playing fields gave good cover for them.

Mabel Lynn's heart pounded with excitement. She had been accused of Lorna's insulting jape in Courtfield. To be able to confront Lorna at last! Her ears were strained for any unusual noise, although she knew that she would hear the first creaking of the door that came to break the utter silence. From her position, too, she could watch the door of the tower. Was it imagination, or did it really move?"

No, imagination. But in a minute, now—

"Help!"

It was a wild yell that caused them all to jump. They whirled round to see the cause, recognising the voice instantly.

PLACES OF INTEREST AT CLIFF HOUSE.

This Week: THE THIRD FORM COMMON-ROOM.



THE Third Form Common-room, even if seldom shown to the parents of Fourth Form girls, is always shown to those visiting Third-Formers.

The Third have no studies. They do their preparation in the class-room under the supervision of a mistress, and for the rest of the evening they have few places to go except to the Common-room. Elsie Brane certainly pays many visits to the library to study learned-looking books; but Elsie is an exception. Most of the others go to the Common-room to talk, or read, or knit, or—to cook! The Common-room is the sight of the Third.

The Third can certainly congratulate themselves on having a very nice room, indeed, on the second floor of the building in which they can spend their leisure hours. For obvious reasons, it is larger than the Common-room allocated to the Fourth. In some ways, however, it cannot boast the same comforts, and perhaps the reasons in this case are also obvious. The Third, it must be confessed, is a very boisterous Form. Armchairs of a delicate nature quickly and unaccountably "come to grief" if placed for the convenience of the Third. Carpets develop sticky spots that take a lot of moving. Curtains of a filmy nature develop ugly-looking tears.

The furniture of the Third, chosen in view of past events, is of a durable nature. The chairs are solid, and can be tipped, rocked, and used by several girls at once without disastrous results. Although Madge Stevens complains that even the best armchair feels like iron when you sit in it, it must also be admitted that the same chair behaves as though made of iron when it forms the subject of a "rag."

Linoleum of a pretty but durable pattern covers the floor, and mats placed here and there have to take the place of carpet. The hassocks are strongly made, so that those who occasionally use them as "ammunition" will not damage them. The curtains to the windows are made of pretty cretonne, and can be clutched in cases of emergency with no more disastrous results than pulling them off the hooks.

From this it will be seen that the Third Form Common-room has, as its keynote, durability! For all that, it is a very comfortable and cosy little place; the fire is a generous one, and there are chairs for all. A few books are provided every week, together with chosen magazines. The pictures on the wall are artistic and pretty. The electric lights are shaded with pretty "jazz" shades, and at night the room has a very pleasing and cosy aspect.

All sorts of queer things take place in the Third, not the least of which is the Session of the Third Form Tribunal, when some girl is brought "to trial" by the rest of the Third Form girls. This institution, the Third-Formers point out with pride, was in force long before the temporary Fourth Form Parliament. Chosen visitors are escorted to a cupboard, and there shown the weird and wonderful "robes of state" that Madge Stevens and her supporters wear when the Tribunal is sitting.

"Common-room teas" are permitted to the Third-Formers on certain nights in the week, because they have not the privilege of study teas as enjoyed by the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth. Often these meals are rather noisy, and are not graced by such dignified members of the Form as Jessie Squire. There are also sing-songs about once a week, if too much noise is not made, and occasional dances, the linoleum providing a very good surface. In view of the well-known high spirits of the occupants of the room, however, it must be admitted that ill-tempered monitresses always find a happy hunting-ground, when really out to "make trouble," in the Third Form Common-room.

"Help! B-B-Babs! The old gig-gig-ghost's got me!" shrieked Bessie Bunter. "Babs, he's j-j-jolly well dragging me along! Help!"

Babs leapt to her feet. So did Mabs and several others. Behind them they could see figures dimly moving to and fro.

"Quick!" yelled Bessie again. "Babs, the old g-g-ghost's shaking me about! Oh dear! Look out! Don't drop me! Yaroooooh! Babs, he's j-j-jolly well thrown me in the flower-bed!"

The girls went rushing forward. They understood at last. Somewhere they had gone absolutely wrong. This was a jape on them. Bessie Bunter was the first victim.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a shaft of light that came from the direction of the lodge the figures of Bertha Breton & Co. became suddenly visible. They were shaking with laughter, and they were pointing. The object of their mirth came into the light as well, and the girls saw Bessie Bunter—Bessie, whose face and dress were simply smothered with wet garden mould.

"Look at her!" pealed Bertha.

"Oh, my hat! What a gorgeous sight!"

"I'm blessed if I can see anything to cackle at," said Bessie Bunter dismally.

"Look at me—I'm smothered! And I thought it was an old g-g-ghost, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babs and Mabs were on their feet again. They had been shaken rather severely, but that was all. They ran forward.

"Good gracious! Look at Bessie!" gasped Babs. "Bertha, have you done that?"

"Helped, my dear, that's all," grinned Bertha Breton. "I can't say it's all my own work, unfortunately. Like it?"

"Don't you think she looks pretty?" tittered Alma Wright.

Babs was gripped with a sudden anger. Five of them had pushed the helpless fat girl on to a flower-bed, with such a result as that. And they thought it funny! She could never remember such an occurrence happening.

"So you think it a joke, Bertha!" Babs cried, stepping close to the red-headed girl.

"You ought to be a detective, guessing things so quickly!" mocked Bertha. "What a fizzle out when you all came ghost-hunting! Ha, ha, ha! Look at dear Bessie! Now you'd better take her in and give her a bath. It would be about the best thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed the Oakvale House girls in chorus.

"So that's your idea of fun, is it?" said Babs, her voice quivering. "Let me tell you it isn't ours, Bertha Breton. We'll make you jolly sorry for working such a horrid jape on anyone!"

"They deserve a good ragging!" cried Phyllis Howell.

"Hear, hear!"

"Oh, we weren't expecting congratulations from you!" sneered Bertha. "You're wild, of course, because we haven't let you poke around the tower and make up some story. You don't catch us napping very often! When it comes to—Oh, my hat! What's the matter with you?"

Bertha stared up at Clara Trevlyn, who was holding her arm.

"I'm going to work very funny jape on you, Bertha," said Clara. "One that will just appeal to you and make you laugh like anything. I'm going to roll you in the flower-bed!"

"Don't you dare! Hands off!" cried Bertha.

She sprang away. But Babs and Mabs held her at that very moment. Bertha's



A CELEBRATION IN THE THIRD!

Described by CLARA TREVLYN (Fourth Form.)

I'VE had full accounts from several prejudiced and unprejudiced witnesses, so I think that I can give you a pretty true account of what really happened on Tuesday evening, and "started the ball rolling."

The Third were going to have a "Celebration" Tea. When the Third have a celebration, you can always reckon that it is to celebrate something—not to have a good old "rag" at all! They always try to get a real good reason. For two or three times it was to honour Madge Stevens' birthday, but after they had had it three times in a term they had to think of something else.

It was suggested that Jumbo's recovery from the motor-bike accident would serve as an excuse, but that fell through when it was pointed out that he had had two recoveries before. They cast about in their minds for other motives, and Doris Redfern finally settled all their doubts by discovering that a shilling would make Piper declare that it was his birthday.

Piper was made to declare it!

After that it was plain sailing, of course.

As I have already suggested, they weren't worrying half so much about Piper as about the tea. And it was settled at that!

They finished the cookery at length, and it was typical Third Form cookery, too! There were plates of little blackened things, and dishes of little blackened things, and saucers of little blackened things—in fact, it was a real home-cooked banquet of the sort that the Third-Formers like! I'm not grumbling about that part at all, because they had cooked it themselves, and they were going to eat it cheerfully, and I always believe in letting everyone have her own taste.

They started off in great form, first carefully selecting the "dainties" that were to be sent to Piper afterwards (as the tea was in his honour, you see!) and then getting busy themselves.

It was through an indiscretion on the part of Minnie Jerome that the trouble arose. Her covetous eyes rested on a bloater reserved for Piper. She wanted it. Thinking herself unobserved, she took it.

"Put that back!" exclaimed Madge Stevens warmly. "That bloater!"

"Why?" said Minnie, in her exasperating way.

"Because it's for Piper!"

"He can have another!" said Minnie easily. "You gave me a burnt one!"

"You burnt it yourself!" said Madge hotly. "I told you at the time it was burning, and you said it wasn't!"

"Mine didn't burn!" said Minnie indignantly. "I'm not going to eat a burnt bloater to please you or anyone else, so there!"

"Put it back!"

"Won't!"

"Put bloater's Piper—I mean, Piper's bloater—back!"

Minnie didn't! Fanny, who was next to her, tried to make her. Minnie got angry. She said that it didn't matter what they sent Piper, as he wouldn't eat it. Some took her part, and some didn't. The supporters of Madge and the supporters of Minnie became so incensed that the obvious thing happened.

The teapot went over with a crash!

The hot brown stream went rushing everywhere, and with shrieks of alarm all the guests leapt to their feet. Minnie and Fanny, by then, each had one end of the disputed bloater, and were treating it much like a bon-bon. (It did part in the end, but whether it contained a cap or a whistle I can't say.) Madge and Doris went rushing to Fanny's aid, and the two Blossoms went to Minnie's. In two minutes it was a free fight!

That's all I've got to tell you about the Third Form celebration. As far as tea was concerned, it was over almost before it was begun. The amusing part is this:

The excuse for the tea was Piper's birthday, agreed to by all.

The quarrel was entirely on the subject of what Piper should get out of the tea. It hardly seems logical to me that they should celebrate a man's birthday, and then quarrel as to whether he was to have a bloater or not!

But that's a way that they have in the Third—especially at these imaginary "Celebrations"!

four companions rushed to her aid. The rest of the Fourth-Formers tried to keep them off.

In a couple of seconds there were the makings of a first-class struggle.

"Goodness gracious! What is happening here?"

It was the stern voice of Miss Steel.

Order came, with great suddenness, out of chaos.

"Barbara, Mabel, Bertha—why, practically the whole Form appears to be out here!" cried Miss Steel. "Shouting and struggling, too! Have you all taken leave of your senses? Go into the school at once, and wait for me there!"

They went. Clara walked beside Bertha & Co. As the most outspoken member of the Fourth she put matters in a nutshell.

"I suppose you'll own up that you started it, Bertha?"

"Started it?" said Bertha indignantly. "My word, I suppose you'll say it's all our fault next!"

"Of course it is!" said Clara. "You ragged Bessie—"

"What were you doing down here, ex-

cept asking to be japed? If you have such interfering mistresses, it's your own fault for not taming them a bit!"

"My hat!" was all Clara could say to that remarkable speech.

Miss Steel joined them in the hall. She gazed at the muddy Bessie Bunter as though she could hardly believe her eyes.

"Goodness gracious! So this is the sort of excitement you have been having? Very ladylike indeed! Barbara Redfern, can you explain?"

Babs looked across at Bertha. It was for the Oakvale House girl to explain. Babs could not do so without sneaking.

Bertha looked quite composed and uttered not a word.

"You have nothing to say?" said Miss Steel. "Very well! I have noticed a tendency to boisterous doings lately, but this is really too bad. Before you start your evening's preparation you will all go and sit in the detention-room for an hour!"

"An hour's detention?" gasped Babs. "That is what I said!"

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 149.

"Us as well, Miss Steel?" said Bertha innocently. "Really—"

"All of you!" said Miss Steel sharply. "No argument at all. Bessie, go and wash yourself as quickly as possible, and join the others. I am ashamed to think that Fourth Form girls have behaved in such a manner!"

Miss Steel shepherded them to the detention-room, and took a seat at the large desk. There were sixteen or seventeen of them, and they filled the room well. She told them to fold their arms, and they did so, and then sat still.

It would have been the height of folly to speak. But at least twelve pairs of eyes turned upon Bertha Breton. Bertha was directly responsible for everything. It had been her "jape." By the Cliff House standard of honour it was almost unthinkable that she should not own up.

They would all have something to say to Bertha afterwards!

Several minutes passed, and then a tap came on the door.

"You must pardon my intrusion into your class—"

"This is detention!" said Miss Steel evenly.

"And, Bertha—I see her there!" exclaimed Miss Matilda Breton, looking shocked. "But she is always such a good girl! Oh, Miss Steel, I am sure that Bertha has not done anything wrong!"

Miss Steel gave Aunt Tilly a somewhat sharp look.

"You will excuse my agitation at this sight, Miss Steel!" explained the aunt. "I have just come from South Africa on a flying visit. I am only staying in England for a short while, and just two or three days in the South. I have already made a fruitless journey to Eppingston, to find the school closed. If only I had come sooner—"

"Under the circumstances, Miss Breton," interrupted the mistress quietly, "I shall release Bertha."

"Oh, how kind of you—how kind!"

she opened the door and led them from the room.

And so the very girls who were responsible for what had happened escaped, thanks to the fortunate arrival of Aunt Tilly, and left the others to it! No wonder the Fourth-Formers stared! No wonder they looked so indignant as their hour dragged on!

And what else? 'Gene was their opportunity to watch the tower! It hadn't been a secret, after all! The strangers had known, in some manner, what they intended to do that night. That was why they had been there to jape them.

They must know all! And the mind of Mabel Lynn, once so hopeful that day, grew black and depressed. Where was Lorna Manton now? She had been so certain of catching her before!

In a mood of dull despair Mabs left the detention-room when the time was up. She joined in none of the indignation felt against Bertha & Co. for their cowardly and selfish silence before Miss Steel. More than once, when she was seated at her prep in Study No. 4, she rose and went to the window, to peer angrily across at the dark tower. She saw nothing out of the ordinary. Yet the girl who had hidden there was the girl who could clear her name!

"Mabel!"

She was startled at the sound of Miss Primrose's voice in the study. She looked up and gasped. The headmistress was accompanied by another lady, the very sight of whom sent the blood flooding to her cheeks!

In a dazed sort of way Mabs rose to her feet.

"Lady Barling has called about that unfortunate occurrence in Courtfield, Mabel," said Miss Primrose.

The silence that fell in the study seemed electric.

"I am told, Mabel," went on the headmistress, "that last night you refused to give your father's address. It was wrong of you. You have no right—"

"Oh, Miss Primrose, I'm an innocent girl!" burst out Mabs all at once. "I refused because it isn't fair—it isn't just! To say—"

"I cannot allow that to pass, Miss Primrose!" interposed Lady Barling in her hard voice. "I will not be accused of injustice. The case was perfectly proved to the satisfaction of two others as well as to my own. I now have your address, Mabel Lynn, and I am sending the bill to your father, as Miss Primrose understands!"

Mabel Lynn's cheeks were flaming.

"Then it's not right. There's no justice in it!" she cried. "Oh, Lady Barling, listen! Last night, after I had seen you, I—I came face to face with the very girl who did it. She ran away, and I chased her, but lost her. Miss Steel will tell you that I was late in. I'm going to find that girl again. I will somehow—I will!"

Lady Barling gave her a cold glance.

"I am afraid that a statement like that cannot alter my opinion."

Mabs was shaken by a sudden tremor. In a vivid flash she suddenly saw all that it meant—Lynn's Folly and the postman, the reading of the letter, and then—yes, a dull sort of comment from her father. Her mother would see the letter, too, and perhaps she would cry. Eric would try to pass the whole thing off. But even madcap little Ivy would know that it was a slur—that Mabs was believed guilty of a cruel and cowardly joke that no one could uphold. Her voice changed to entreaty.

"Lady Barling, please!" she said imploringly. "Perhaps you will hold that letter back—just two days! Perhaps you will give me the week-end to make a



AUNT TILLY'S DISBELIEF! "The old story—ha, ha, ha!" commented Aunt Tilly, going off into a most aggravating chuckle. "The poor little girl who can't get justice! But I know the little japes that you girls love to perform!"

"Come in, Bessie!" called Miss Steel.

But it was the school page who entered. He was followed by a short lady who wore pince-nez and voluminous but old-fashioned clothes. She glanced round the room, then gave Miss Steel a sort of curtsey, and smiled at her.

Bertha Breton & Co. exchanged looks, and grinned.

They knew!

Aunt Tilly!

"MISS STEEL, I believe—the Fourth Form mistress?" said the lady, in a rather loud and drawing voice. "A thousand apologies, Miss Steel, for coming here to introduce myself. I am Miss Matilda Breton, of South Africa. You may have heard that I was coming? I am Bertha Breton's aunt!"

"Then I am pleased to meet you!" said Miss Steel, shaking hands with her usual cold politeness.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 149.

cried the other. "I have been looking forward so much to taking her out this evening. And her four friends, too—Marie and Alma are two of them. Bertha talks so much about them in her letters. Perhaps I shall find them somewhere else?"

"They are all here," said Miss Steel.

"Dear me! What a pity! I—I suppose it would be asking too much—"

"It is very unusual to release five girls from detention, but I shall be pleased to do so under the circumstances, of course," said Miss Steel unsuspectingly. "Bertha, Marie, Alma, Sylvia, and Olivia—you may all rise and leave this room. I shall have an opportunity of seeing you again, Miss Breton, when you return?"

"Oh, certainly, Miss Steel! I shall be charmed!" said Aunt Tilly.

The Fourth-Formers stared. They had seen aunts at Cliff House before, but never one quite like Aunt Tilly! She was hugging Bertha for at least the fifth time before she seemed to remember that she had come to take the girls out! Then

last attempt to clear myself. Before you write, let me try once more—

"I regret that I cannot," said Lady Barling frigidly. "I should have liked you better and been more merciful if you had been frank about the whole matter. Nothing will alter my decision now."

Mabs stood, gripping the table to steady herself. Bessie Bunter was asking in a husky whisper if she could lend Mabs the money. But it was not that. Two tears started to Mabs' glimmering eyes. She blinked them back. She set her teeth and gulped at the lump that rose in her throat. Miss Primrose gave her a compassionate glance, and closed the door as Lady Barling turned away.

"Poor Mabs!" muttered Barbara Redfern.

Her arm was round her shoulders as Mabs dropped back to her chair.

"It isn't the money!" said Mabs chokingly. "And yet if—if I had it I—I believe I'd almost pay rather than have that letter sent. It's what the dad and mum will think when they read what I'm accused of."

"They will believe in you, Mabs," said Babs softly.

"I—I know they will!" Mabs drew a deep breath. "But it's asking them to believe. I know what they'll say. A mistake. Yet they can't be sure. It might be me. They'll know that. I've proved nothing, Babs. If that girl has left the Tower—she may have done—how can I hope to see her again?"

She sat, her teeth shut again, her breath coming quickly through them. Laughing voices sounded in the passage. Bertha Breton opened the door.

"This is my study, Aunt Tilly. I have to wedge in with these others," Bertha said.

"Oh, how dreadful for a girl of refined tastes!" commented Miss Matilda Breton. "I quite understand how you feel. Dear me, is this girl with bobbed hair the one you were telling me about?"

"Yes, Aunt Tilly."

Mabs stared up at the newcomer, with a vaguely hostile feeling.

"A very old idea—very old indeed—making up as a princess!" said Aunt Tilly, wagging her forefinger reprovingly at Mabs. "Still, I know how thoughtless you girls are, and how you like to have your little bit of fun."

An unusual and furious anger welled up in Mabel Lynn's heart.

"What are you hinting at?" she exclaimed. "What do you mean? If you're hinting that I carried out a joke in Courtfield, I didn't, and no one shall say I did!"

Aunt Tilly wagged the admonishing forefinger again.

"The old story! Ha, ha, ha!" she commented, going off into a most aggravating chuckle. "The poor little girl who can't get justice! But I know the little japes that you girls love to perform!"

"I didn't do it, and that's all about it!" blazed Mabs. "What's more, I won't have you coming here saying such things when you know nothing about the case!"

"Dear me, what a little spitfire she is!" said Aunt Tilly. "Is she really going to work a jape on me now, Bertha, do you think? As I've come to sit with you in your study for a little while—"

"If you're coming in here, I'm going out!" Mabs cut in hotly. "There's no need to argue. My idea of a jape isn't that sort of thing, and if you can't take

my word, we'd better not see any more of each other!"

Slam!

Mabs went down the passage. She knew that she had lost her temper, and she was fighting to regain it. She went to the darkened quadrangle and paced up and down, the old wound stung again by the chattering tongue of this outspoken aunt.

Up and down she walked, thinking of home, and Courtfield, and Lorna Manton. She paced across to the Tower, and stood listening intently for any sound that might betray the fact that a girl was hiding inside. She heard nothing. Too late? She was beginning to feel convinced that Lorna had evaded her, after all.

The bell rang for supper, and she returned at last to the school. Babs met her, the worried expression clearing from her face when her eyes fell at last on her chum.

"You've been outside, Mabs?"

At Lorna's Home!

LORNA MANTON—I think it's hopeless to look for her here any more!"

Dinner was over on Saturday, when the members of the Fourth Form met in the Common-room. Barbara Redfern was the leading spirit. She did not need to glance at the sad, fixed look on the face of her chum, Mabel Lynn, to feel that they must do something, and do that at once.

"No. Lorna Manton's gone—I'm sure of that!" spoke up Katie Smith, after Barbara's statement. "I fixed a piece of stamp-paper on the door of the tower last night, girls. If anyone had gone in or come out it would have been broken. It was quite intact."

"What a smart kid you are!" said Clara Trevlyn admiringly. "But what does it mean, girls? Has Lorna really gone home?"

"She must have done," said Babs.



THE GIRL AT THE WINDOW! Mabel Lynn's heart bounded, and she caught her breath in a sudden wild excitement. For the girl who had come to the window was the girl whom Mabs had chased in Friardale—Lorna Manton!

"Yes—anywhere for fresh air! Has that woman gone?" jerked Mabs.

Barbara's reply was as startling as it was dismaying.

"Gone? Good gracious, no!" she said. "That's why I wanted to see you. She's been in the study all the evening, and she's been perfectly horrid to everyone—making remarks about the parrot, calling Bessie too fat, and all that sort of thing. And she's going to stay the night!"

"Going to stay—here?" gasped Mabs.

"Yes. I've never heard anything like it, really," said Babs. "She practically asked Miss Steel if she could fix her up with a room for the night—not in so many words, but Miss Steel could do nothing else. She's to have the mistresses' spare bed-room." Babs lowered her voice. "Do you know, Mabs, this Aunt Tilly is insulting, and a cadger, and the queerest visitor I've ever seen at Cliff House!"

And Mabs found, before many minutes had passed, that that was the general opinion in the Form.

"That's what I've been thinking. And perhaps, girls, it's better for us that she has gone. Don't you see how we can get at her now?"

"What?" said quick-witted Clara.

"Surely you don't mean—"

"Go to her home to see her?" cried Babs, her eyes shining. "Why, girls, that's just what I do mean! Listen! Lorna's supposed to have gone away with her parents; but she hasn't done so, as we know. We can guess where she is, I think."

"Living in her empty home!" ejaculated Clara.

"More than possibly," nodded Babs. "I've found out that it is at Planley, not fifteen miles from here. What's wrong with a cycle ride over there on such a glorious day as this?"

The suggestion took them by storm.

And Mabel Lynn's eyes were shining at last!

"Oh, Babs, it's a splendid idea!" she cried. "Go to Lorna's home. Why, THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 149.

of course, that's the thing to do! Even if her parents were there, I'd go now. It would only be right. After all, that bill has been sent to my own parents so—"

And there her voice went suddenly husky and broke off. She blinked her brightened eyes, and they knew what was in her mind. Lady Barling's letter must have reached Lynn's folly by now. Mr. and Mrs. Lynn must know of what their daughter was accused!

Babs, with her arm about her chum's shoulders, faced the others.
"Shall we start now, girls?" she cried.
"I'm coming, Babs!" squeaked Bessie Bunter. "I've had my bike done up, you know. It runs rippingly now. I'll be there long before any of you! I'm sure—"

There Bessie Bunter broke off. The loud voice that was suddenly heard in the passage penetrated to the Common-room. They could not help hearing.

"Is that our car outside, girls? Splendid! I'd better say good-bye to your little friends—eh?"

The door of the Common-room opened, without a preliminary tap, to reveal—Aunt Tilly!

"Just off for a motor-ride, girls," she announced. "Sorry there's no room for any of you. I'd like to have taken you, Mabel. Still, I expect you'll be able to go out, and work some of your little japes—eh?"

"I'll ask you to say nothing more about what I've been accused of!" said Mabs hotly.

"Not good enough, my dear—not quite good enough!" said Miss Matilda Breton, chuckling again. "Ha, ha, ha! I know that little bits of fun you love to have! Do something different this time—eh?"

"I tell you—" cried Mabs, and then broke off as the door closed. She stood there, trembling, the colour hot in her cheeks.

She heard the Oakvale House girls laughing with their amazing companion as they walked along the passage.

"It's horrid cheek!" said Babs indignantly.

Mabs clenched her hands.

"I detest that woman, with her horrid, sneering way!" she muttered. "Thank goodness, they're going out in a car! I hope they go miles. I'd like to think that I was never going to see her here again!"

Babs took her arm gently.

"Let's get the bikes out," she suggested. "By the time we're ready they'll be miles away!"

They went down to the bicycle-shed, nine or ten strong. By the time that they reached the gates there was no sign of a car, or of Bertha Breton & Co.

"Full steam, girls!" exclaimed Clara.

They mounted their machines and rode away.

Little could Mabs, or any of them, guess the truth! They could not know what a daring deception was being practised on them. If they had, they would not have ridden with such high hearts to Lorna Manton's home to look for her there.

Bessie Bunter, in spite of the "overhauling" of her ancient machine, was not leading by any manner of means. But she bucked up considerably when seven or eight miles had been covered, and there was a talk of refreshments.

They halted for ten minutes, then pressed on again. They came in sight of the village without mishap, and were able to ask where the Firs was situated.

"Just up the lane, miss," a postman said. "The lane you've just passed leads past the back of the house."

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 149.

Babs thanked him, and turned as indicated. They looked expectantly, and presently saw a moderately large house amongst the trees. The name was on the gate.

"The Firs, Planley!" Babs murmured. "It's the right address, anyway. Hallo! I don't see smoke coming from any of the chimneys!"

"Seems absolutely deserted," said Clara. "Still, there's only one thing



ONE OF AN EDITRESS' WORRIES— BESSIE BUNTER

By Barbara Redfern.

Mabs and I were frightfully busy in Study No. 1, when Bessie Bunter rolled in, with a very cheerful smile on her fat face.

"I've got a spiffing idea!" declared Bessie. "I've been writing it out in the Common-room!"

"Go and write some more about it!" said Mabs absently.

We went on with our labours with most businesslike intent. We hoped to discourage Bessie, but it takes a lot to do that!"

"It's about 'Harmony at School,'" said Bessie.

No answer. We scrawled furiously. "As one of the most influential girls in the school, I consider that it's quite time that someone took things in hand!" said Bessie, no longer to be denied. "I've been thinking what a lot of squabbles there are in school—after reading a jolly fine book on the subject, you know!"

We scribbled furiously, but it did not daunt Bessie.

"Girls should not squabble!" proceeded our study-mate in a louder and more penetrating voice.

"We shall if you make such a noise!" said Mabs.

"It all comes through misunderstandings—"

"Misunder-fiddlesticks!"

"Are you going to listen to me?" hooted Bessie.

We turned and gave her two concentrated glares.

"No!" we said together.

"There you are!" declared Bessie.

"Just what I've provided for in Rule 3!"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Mabs.

"It's a scheme for stopping squabbles at Cliff House!" said Bessie, pleased to see that we were hearing her at last. "I've called it 'Harmony.' I've often said there's such a thing as being too proud to squabble with a girl. If you read my rules on 'How to Have Harmony at Cliff House' you'll see what I mean—make the school an altogether new place for girls to live in!"

"Let's see!" said Mabs.

So we gazed at last at the ink-spattered document that Bessie had produced. It wasn't wise for us, I know. We smiled; then we chuckled; then we laughed; finally we shrieked at it. It finished our editorial labours completely for that evening.

Take it from me, Bessie isn't much help to a busy Editress!

(What Bessie wrote will be found on the opposite page.—ED.)

for us to do. What's the matter, Mabs?"

Mabel Lynn had opened the gate, propped her cycle just inside, and was about to go up to the house.

"I'm going up to see what I can, Clara!" Mabs answered. "Perhaps one may be more successful than several.

She went hurrying on, while her chums were still dismounting.

Lorna Manton! Was she really at home? Mabs was asking herself. Poor Mabs knew nothing of the truth that

would so have damped her expectations. She did not know how probable it was that their ride would be in vain.

Goodness! What was that?

She stopped suddenly, her whole attitude tense. Yes, someone was banging away on a piano in the house—a waltz tune, it sounded. She heard a jarring sound, as though two pieces of furniture had collided. Laughing voices came to her ears, and then—

Her heart bounded. She caught her breath in sudden, wild excitement. A girl had come to the front window to gaze idly outside. Their eyes met. And in that moment Mabs saw the girl she had met in Courtfield, the girl she had pursued in Friardale—Lorna Manton!

Only just for a moment. She disappeared abruptly from the window, as though she had thrown herself back.

But Mabs had seen!

"Babs! All of you!" she cried. "She's here—Lorna's here! Quickly!"

They came pelting up the drive to the house, while Mabs darted this way and that, too excited almost to know what to do next.

"You've seen her?" Babs cried.

"Yes—at the window! It was only for a second, but I haven't made any mistake! My hat, the piano's stopped now!"

"She's been holding a sort of party?" breathed Babs.

Mabel Lynn went running up to the front door, and seized the knocker.

"I'll catch her this time, anyway!" she panted. "She can't dodge me when I know she's in the house! I'll make such a noise that she'll have to answer the door!"

Thump, thump, thump!

Mabs stopped. The last dull echoes of her knocking died away in an utter silence that was truly startling.

"You're sure you saw her, Mabs?" ejaculated Babs.

"Yes—positive! She's hiding, of course—thinks perhaps that we shall go away. But I'm not going; not if I have to stand and knock all the afternoon!"

Thump, thump, thump!

Mabs banged again, and yet again—louder each time, it seemed. Anger was burning in her heart. She had been tricked before. She wouldn't be tricked this time. No, not when she had found Lorna Manton at her home! She would see her somehow, and force the girl to confess.

Thump! Clatter, clatter!

"It's no good, young ladies!"

The deep voice startled all the girls clustered around the front door. They turned, to see a plump, red-faced police-constable, who wheeled a bike.

"No good calling 'ere, miss," explained the constable. "Place is locked up and empty—as been since last Wednesday. Mr. and Mrs. Manton have gone away."

"But it isn't empty—"

"What?"

"I just saw a girl inside!" cried Mabs, too carried away to think what she was saying.

"What? You say you saw someone?" said the constable, suddenly looking very grave and very important. "Serious matter that, miss, if you haven't made a mistake. I'm responsible for looking after the empty houses round here, and I've got one of the keys of this place. If you're so positive, young lady, I'm going to enter to have a look round!"

For a moment Mabs' heart smote her as the constable fumbled in his pocket.

But surely this could not be considered any sort of sneaking? No! Lorna would be known to the policeman, and could easily explain her presence.

Click!

The door had opened as soon as the key was turned. With pounding heart Mabs made as though to follow the constable.

"You can't all come in, young ladies, seeing as I knows nothing about you," said the constable. "Three of you, and then I must shut the door again."

Mabs was in the hall, and so was Babs. A struggle—and then the fat and triumphant face of Bessie Bunter appeared. It was wonderful how Bessie contrived always to be in the front.

"Follow me, young ladies!" said the constable.

Mabs followed, her heart fluttering more wildly than ever. Would they really find Lorna now? She was sure of the room in which she had seen the girl's face, but it was empty now!

And that prepared them a little for the disappointments to follow.

They followed along a passage, and into other rooms. Then they explored the top part of the house. Room after room was searched—fruitlessly! Not a sign of anyone anywhere now!

They were about to come downstairs again, knowing that the constable was prepared to speak of excitable schoolgirls, when—

Clatter!
"Gracious! What's that?" gasped Babs.

The constable thudded down the stairs and along the passage. He called to them:

"The back door's unfastened, and blowing in the wind! Must have bumped against the wall."

They joined him, and saw that it was true.

"And there's something in what you say, too," the constable went on. "I saw that all the doors was properly fastened only yesterday. Someone's been in here, miss, and left by the back door. Very serious matter indeed!" He stared about him. "But they've made good their escape now. I shall go back in the house to see whether I can see if anything 'as been took."

"Can we go out this way, please?" asked Mabs.

"Certainly, if you want to, miss," said the constable. "Thank you for your information."

He drew the door shut behind them. Mabs heard the bolt click, then gripped her chum's arm. She was trembling with excitement.

"I didn't speak because—because the constable could do no good now!" she whispered. "I saw something from one of the top windows that he didn't. There's a closed motor waiting in that lane at the back!"

"A motor!"

"Yes; and it hasn't moved. See! There's a path down here, right from one lane to the other. Get the others together, and we'll follow!"

They fled along the side of the house to rejoin their companions. In breathless gasps Mabs gave her report.

"Quickly!" she finished. "We can cross this path to the further lane. I'm sure that motor has something to do with it. Lorna isn't in the house; she must be there! Hurry!"

But they did not need that advice as they snatched up their machines and coasted after Mabs along the path. And then—

B-r-r-r-r!

It was the roar of a starting motor-engine!

Mabs was in her saddle in a flash, pounding at the pedals. The path was rough, but Mabs and many others managed to ride it. They whirled into

the lane beyond just as a closed motor-car began to move away from the spot.

"Stop!"

The car gathered speed, heedless of that wild cry. Mabs rode as she had never ridden before. For the first minute she just held her own. But as the car turned into the main road it went faster.

The Cliff House girls were trailed out in a long line of pursuers. It seemed



HOW TO HAVE HARMONY AT CLIFF HOWSE!

By BESSIE BUNTER
(Fourth Form.)

Being a most infocenshal gerl, I take up my pen in the good cause of stopping quarrells at Cliff Howse.

If you follow the following speshul rools that I have thort out you will never quarrell with anyone agane:

(1) *Never be suspishus.* I regard this as moast impertent, and I should like to bring it to the notiss of mistrisses who are suspishus about prep. Thinking that a gerl has negiected her prep often leads to detension, and that's enough to make anyone squabbel.

(2) *Studdy your frends as though they were your sisters.* This is a very impertent rool indeed. Always beleeve a girl when she sees that she reely needs a snack to keep up her strenkth, just as though she was your sister. A girl whose figger is being negiected is always in the mood to squabbel.

(3) *Always listen to what a gerl has to say.* Some gerls are jellus about the wise things that uther gerls can say, but they shouldnt be. Heaps of wise remarks would be made if they were only listened to.

(4) *Doant Worry About little mistake.* This is auther moast impertent rool. I can tell you a case in queschon. The uther evening I wanted to cook something, and I borrowed Doly Jobbeling's frying-pan for a few minnits. I was very obliging, and cleened out some black, sticky stuff before I did my own cooking. Apparently I made a littel mistake, becoss Doly came rushing at me, and said it was her toffee that I had cleened out, and we had a squabbel, in which she pulled my hair for me. If she had red this rool, it would have saved a lot of fuss.

(5) *Don't try to rob other people of their dew credit.* This is a particular falling of Freader Foot's. I often make jokes, and she declares that she made them first, and I have borrowed them. If it was not for the fact that I am too proud to argue about a silley old joak, I should frequently be quarrelling with Freader. All gerls, as it happens, are not like me, so they ort to lern this rule.

(6) *Never turn your back on a frend,* espeshully when she is explaning that through the folt of the Post Offis a letter has been delayed, and a remittance is overdw. As I have already sed, I am a proud sort of gerl myself, and such things doant worry be, but it might upset a lot of gerls and make them squabbel.

Hopping that everyone is going to adopt these rules, I remane, your loving frend,
BESSIE BUNTER.

hopeless, but Mabs was not going to give up yet. Not even a glimpse into the car had she obtained, yet she felt certain about at least one occupant. If only—

Gracious, the car was slackening speed! It had stopped! She pedalled frantically on. Only a hundred yards between them—eighty—sixty! A joyful yell from behind betokened that the others had seen what was happening. In the window at the back of the car the scared face of a girl appeared

momentarily. Mabs caught a glimpse of red hair—the hair of Bertha Breton, was it?

Forty yards lessened to thirty. And then—

B-r-r-r-r!

The car was starting again!

Mabs forced herself on with every ounce of energy she possessed. Within ten yards of the vehicle she came before its speed grew greater than her own. Then she lagged. The car was roaring along at a speed that grew greater every moment. Pursuit was useless. They were beaten, after all, by a matter of yards. Now nothing could hope to come near the car. It disappeared into the far distance and hummed to silence!

The Insult at the Theatre!

MORE than an hour later a party of dispirited cyclists entered Cliff House School, and wheeled their machines to the cycle-shed. It was only when they were going up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage that anyone spoke.

"I'm certain that Bertha Breton & Co. were there," said Mabel Lynn. "I'm positive, now, that that was Bertha's face I saw in the car. They must have been taking their aunt to see Lorna. They must have been dancing when we arrived at the house. If they're in I'll tax them with it now!"

But none of the "Co." were to be found in the Fourth Form passage.

"We sha'n't let it drop, anyway!" said Clara grimly. "My hat! What ever sort of aunt is this giddy Aunt Tilly to let them get up to such nonsense? She must have been there encouraging them!"

"Must have been!"

"It's all very well having Bertha and the others here; we can't prevent that!" went on Clara, with rising warmth. "But to be saddled with their giddy aunt as well—well, I consider it the limit!"

"That aunt must know all about Lorna Manton now!" said Babs.

"Yes; perhaps she's known all the time," said Mabel Lynn indignantly. "It may account for the horrid way she's chuckled at me! Absolutely hand in glove with the others—even to helping Lorna to escape with them all this afternoon! And now—" She looked away, and gave a hard sigh—"now they've tricked us, after all!"

Bessie Bunter prepared the tea in Study No. 4, and explained the plentiful show of good things were because she had such a sinking feeling after her long ride. And that sinking feeling was attended to very well when they sat down.

But Babs and Mabs were not really watching Bessie. Lorna Manton had given them the slip, but they were not going to forget about her. They were wondering what she would do next. Would it be possible to surprise Bertha & Co. anywhere, while Lorna was still in their company?

Babs called off-handedly in reply to a tap on the door, and was surprised to see Miss Steel.

"I have a little surprise for you, girls," remarked Miss Steel. "Would you three care to go to the theatre this evening?"

"We should, thanks very much, Miss Steel," Babs answered, surprised. But in their present state of mind the girls were not quite so delighted as they would otherwise have been.

"Very good," nodded Miss Steel. "I should like you to be ready as soon as possible. I am asking Marjorie, Clara,



AN EXPERIMENT ON THE THIRD!

By FRED A FOOTE (Fourth Form.)

THERE'S a very queer phrase for making the peace. People often talk about extending the olive branch. Have you ever thought it out? If the said branch was at all thick, the person to whom it was extended might very easily grab at it, and give you one for your trouble! At least, that's how it appears to me!

All of which brings me to Bessie Bunter.

Bessie is very impressionable. She read some book about the League of Nations, and immediately pictured herself in similar guise at Cliff House, forgetting that she still remained Bessie Bunter, whatever might be the noble intentions in her mind. She offered a set of "roofs" to Babs, and had them laughed at. In a very indignant frame of mind she was walking round the school, looking for someone who would read them more carefully (Miss Steel, or the Bull, for instance!) when she passed the Third Form Common-room, and heard a fearful din coming from inside.

Evidently there was little harmony in the Third just then.

To think, with Bessie, is to act. She seldom meditates. She didn't meditate then. She simply sailed into the Common-room, and smiled serenely at the junior girls.

It was a terrific scrimmage that Bessie Bunter saw.

The table was set for a disordered and abandoned tea. The members of the Third were grouped in two camps. Madge Stevens headed one; Minnie Jerome headed the other. They were arguing and rushing, and cushions were flying, and there was generally a first-class "rag" in progress.

"Stop!" cried Bessie majestically.

Sure enough, there was a cessation in the noise. Bessie was too busy blinking at the paper she carried, however, to see the indignation on the faces of both parties at being given such an order—by Bessie!

"I've come to stop this sort of thing!" said Bessie, blinking at her manuscript. "Here you are, girls! Rule one—never be suspicious. Rule two—study your friends as though they were sisters. Rule three—always listen—"

"Have you gone off your head?" inquired Madge Stevens.

Bessie Bunter blinked indignantly, but suddenly recollected herself.

"No; that's rule three, you know. Always listen to what a girl has to say. But perhaps it's rule four that applies to you. That says—"

"Go away!"

"But I've come down to stop this squabbling!" protested Bessie indignantly. "I've got out ripping rules that stop all this sort of thing. Being a Fourth-Former, you know, I think of this sort of thing. Rule four says—don't worry about little mistakes. Now for rule five! This is a spiff! Rule five is—"

"Are you going out?" demanded Madge Stevens.

"Oh, really—"

"It's like your cheek coming down here and talking to us like this!" said Madge warningly. "We'll give you just three seconds to clear off! You stop quarrels, indeed! And we're not quarrelling! We're only arguing! Now—one, two—"

"I sus-sus-say—"

"Three! And she's not gone! Pelt her, girls!"

Bessie Bunter shrieked as a shower of cushions fell about her. It really was not a nice reception for a girl on such a friendly and diplomatic mission. The one that struck Bessie's plump nose seemed particularly unfriendly.

"Ow-wow-wow!" gasped Bessie. "I'll make you sorry for this! You—you sha'n't do that sort of thing to me!"

The peaceful intention had quite deserted Bessie Bunter. She picked up a hassock and threw it at Madge.

"Bessie!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bessie, staring in a horrified manner at Isabel Drake of the Sixth. "I—I didn't know you were watching—I mean, I've come here—"

"Bessie, I am ashamed to see you throwing a hassock, of all things, at Third Form girls! You will come with me immediately! The noise down here has become so disgraceful that we cannot work at all!"

"I—I sus-sus-say, Isabel—"

"It's our fault!" struck in Madge Stevens, who always owns up. "We were making the noise, and Bessie—"

"I saw what she did!" interrupted Isabel. "You will take fifty lines for being concerned in this riotous scene. Now, Bessie, come with me—"

"But I—I haven't been rioting. I—I'm for peace!" quivered Bessie.

"I am ashamed of you, Bessie!"

"But I tell you—"

"Come!"

Isabel's hand descended on Bessie's shoulder, and Bessie vanished abruptly from the Third Form Common-room.

Which was hardly fair on Bessie, especially as she had visited the Third-Formers with the laudable idea of convincing them that it was not a good thing to throw things at each other!

and Dolly as well. I have been sent a box ticket, and you six girls are the next on the list!"

The door closed.

"A theatre! Hurrah!" yelled Bessie Bunter. "We haven't been to one all the term, have we?"

"I wish we could have a look round for Lorna Manton!" muttered Mabs.

"Well, we can't, dear!" Babs answered. "Bertha Breton & Co. seem the only ones who can get out these days"

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 149.

and stay out as long as they like—thanks to auntie!"

Marjorie Hazeldene looked into the study, and smiled. Clara and Dolly were in the passage.

"Going to get ready?" asked Marjorie. "The Steely lady won't want to wait long, and we don't want to miss the bus in Friardale."

"We'll be ready as soon as you are!" promised Babs.

Mabs needed some coaxing. She was still terribly disappointed. But Babs did

all the coaxing required, knowing that it would be better to turn her chum's thoughts to something else.

They were ready in time, and walked to the village with Miss Steel. She informed them that they were to see light opera, but prevented Bessie Bunter from waxing learned on the subject. Miss Steel knew Bessie!

They caught the bus after some delay, and were soon at the theatre. The first performance had started, but they reached their box and made themselves comfortable. Even Mabs began to cheer up.

The singing was particularly good. Concerning the trilling soprano, Bessie Bunter made husky whispered comments that she was going to learn the same song herself. Miss Steel silenced her with a look.

The other singers were good, but when the soprano appeared again there was a sort of expectant hush. Just once the girls thought they heard a kind of stifled sniggering that came from the stalls.

But it died away as the soprano gained power and filled the whole theatre with her song. The orchestra accompanied very softly. A long, trilling passage commenced, and then—

Tinkle!

A gasp seemed to pass through the whole theatre.

Tinkle! again.

The soprano stopped dead. And Babs and Mabs, gazing with horrified eyes at the brilliantly-lit stage, saw the cause of the interruption—two pennies that were rolling slowly to the lady's feet!

Miss Steel, usually considered un-emotional, sprang angrily to her feet.

At the same moment cries broke out in the stalls. The soprano was moving as though to walk off, and remonstrances came from all parts of the house. A light sprang up in the stalls.

"This is the person who threw those coins!" a gentleman was exclaiming. "Unless that person is sent out—"

Two attendants were there now. Amidst all the risen, excited figures, it was difficult to see the delinquent. The Cliff House girls tried. Bessie leant so excitedly that she looked like falling out of the box!

"A joke—just meant as a little joke!" a voice protested.

Babs and Mabs felt their hearts pounding. Where had they heard that voice before?

"The play will not go on while you are here, madam!" said a gruff attendant.

"And she deserves to be turned out!" cried several angry voices, while booing and hissing started in the gallery.

There was a movement now in the crowd, and several figures seemed to have risen. One, at last, came into view.

"My goodness!" gasped Barbara Redfern.

She knew why the voice had seemed so familiar.

The figure being turned out of the theatre was that of Miss Matilda Breton, Bertha Breton's aunt!

"It's Aunt Tilly!" gasped Bessie Bunter, in a reedy whisper.

Miss Steel was staring, like one in a trance. And now the others were silent again. They saw Aunt Tilly, an attendant holding her arm. Behind her came five girls—Bertha Breton, Marie Tate-Graham, Alma Wright, and Sylvia and Olivia!

And then a most unexpected whisper came from Mabel Lynn:

"Lorna Manton isn't with them!"

Only then did thoughts of that afternoon come flooding back to Babs. They had smuggled Laura away in the car, of course. It was quite true that she was

not with them now. Babs could understand why that was the first thought to enter her chum's head.

"Sssssssss!"

There was hissing from the pit as Aunt Tilly was led down the centre gangway. And how alarmed the other five looked as they walked behind her! Not one turned her eyes to the boxes, where Bessie was joining in the hissing as heartily as anyone.

But could anyone be sorry for them? The eyes of the Cliff House girls flashed as angrily as any. Was this the sort of thing that Aunt Tilly did? She was more like a thoughtless and offensive schoolgirl than a grown woman!

"Sit down now, girls!" whispered Miss Steel suddenly.

They sat down. The scene was over. The soprano, after frantic cheering at her bow, started to sing her song again. Order settled in the theatre.

But for the Cliff House girls the performance had lost much of its pleasure. This was how Bertha & Co. were spending the evening with their aunt, after obtaining a special pass! This was their idea of a jape when they were wearing the Cliff House colours!

The opera came to an end, and they mingled with the crowd at the exit door. Miss Steel was left temporarily behind.

"What a contemptible trick!" Marjorie Hazeldene exclaimed.

"It would have served her right if the people in the stalls had ragged her!" Clara exclaimed. "Still, the Steely one's seen it! Did you see the way she looked? I don't think, somehow, that auntie's going to be made so welcome at Cliff House after this!"

"But Lorna Manton wasn't with them—that's what is puzzling me!" said Mabel Lynn dejectedly. "We're almost sure that she was with them in the car this afternoon. Where has she gone? Has she returned home again, or what?"

Miss Steel joined them again before anyone could answer those questions. They walked back to the school, almost silently.

The calm before the storm! Yes, they all guessed that!

They were in the school at last, and their eyes fell on figures in the entrance hall. Six of them—and how the pulses of the Cliff House girls tingled as they recognised them! Aunt Tilly and Bertha Breton & Co. were here, just inside the door, laughing together!

"My hat!" breathed Clara. "What's going to happen now?"

Miss Steel spoke almost at that moment.

"Miss Breton, please!" she exclaimed, her voice clear and hard.

Aunt Tilly seemed to give a start, and became suddenly serious.

"Ah! It is Miss Steel!" she exclaimed. "You see we are back—"

"We have just returned from the theatre ourselves!" said Miss Steel.

They heard the gasp that Aunt Tilly gave.

"From—from the theatre?"

"Yes. And we saw what happened, Miss Breton," said Miss Steel.

Babs caught her breath. Aunt Tilly, so self-possessed as a rule, was actually trembling. And what bewildered and panicky glances the others were exchanging!

"My little joke—oh, it was such a pity that it was taken that way!" Aunt Tilly forced herself to say.

"It was intended as a joke?" asked Miss Steel, a touch of colour in each cheek. "I took it that it was an insult!"

"An insult!" Again Aunt Tilly trembled. "Oh, Miss Steel, how you

hurt me by saying that! I had no idea that my little bit of fun would be received in such a way!"

"In what other way could it possibly be received?" rasped Miss Steel.

"An insult was not intended, I—I assure you! I was horrified. I at once went to the stage door and apologised to the lady—"

"Exactly!" nodded Miss Steel coldly.

"At the same time, I must say that I allowed you to take your niece and her friends out, having full confidence that you would look after them. After this happening it will either be my duty to speak to Miss Primrose, or to see—"

Goodness gracious! Is anything the matter?"

Aunt Tilly had reeled. In a moment Bertha Breton and the white-faced Marie Tate-Graham were at her side, supporting her.

"Just a passing faintness to which I am subject!" muttered Aunt Tilly, her eyes shut.

Miss Steel's manner had changed.

"I am very sorry—"

"Aunt Tilly has had fever, Miss Steel!" jerked out Bertha Breton. "My mother has told me. She has these little attacks, but they do not last long. Just a day or so—"



BESSIE BUNTER BEFORE THE COUNCIL!

By PAULINE WILSON (Sixth Form.)

WE first knew that we were to have a visitor while we were sitting waiting for Isabel Drake's return, so that we could go on with the montress' Council.

The Council had met on Tuesday evening, as usual, to discuss routine matters affecting the school. Its activities had been greatly hampered by the continuous and rising din that we suspected to be coming from the Third Form Common-room—not an infrequent happening. As Isabel is very good at quelling that sort of thing, we had despatched her to investigate.

"Isabel's made a capture!" remarked Happy Helen Henley, as she heard the voice. "A good thing, too!" said Stella Stone. "The din was really too bad for anything. I think we'd better make an example of whomsoever it is, and let the whole Council try her. It will be an example to the others."

"Hear, hear!"

The door opened just as we were agreeing, to admit an unexpected visitor. Bessie Bunter was responsible for the loud protests that had reached our ears.

"Bessie!" said Stella, in surprise.

Isabel made her report quickly. She had found a riotous scene in progress, and Bessie Bunter taking a prominent part—throwing a hassock. A very bad example for a Fourth Form girl to set, as Isabel said.

"Stand before the Council!" said Stella Stone sternly.

Bessie Bunter blinked in great alarm.

"The kik-kik-council!" she gasped. "Oh, I say! This is nice treatment when I jolly well went down to make them quiet!"

"Good gracious! What was that?" asked Stella.

Bessie flourished a crumpled paper.

"My new rules for making girls happy!" she exclaimed. "Isabel's made a mistake. If only I had my way—"

"Bessie, do not talk nonsense!"

"There you are!" declared Bessie triumphantly. "You've gone and broken rule three already! No wonder there's such a lot of misunderstanding in this school. Rule three says you should always listen to what a girl has to say—"

Stella looked like springing at Bessie.

"What ever is this nonsense you are talking?" she cried.

"There you are! You've broken another!" exclaimed Bessie Bunter again. "Rule five says you should never rob people of their due credit—"

"Bessie! Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"Nun-no! I—I've been thinking out—"

"Listen, please! Isabel says that you were throwing hassocks about. You are before the Council now. Why were you, as a Fourth Form girl, doing such a thing?"

"I—I wasn't!"

"You were!" said Isabel.

"Oh dear! Th-th-that's a slip of the pen—I mean, the tongue! I went down to read them my rules, and—and they threw something at me. I—I just broke rule number—no!"—Bessie fished and fumbled at her paper—"rule number two, about studying sisters as friends—I mean, friends as sisters—to throw the hassock, and teach them, and then—"

"Bessie!" said Stella, amazed beyond measure. "Show me that paper you are holding!"

"Oh, certainly!" said Bessie, greatly relieved. "Then you'll understand my fine scheme!"

We all looked at the paper that Stella was holding. How we kept from even smiling I can't think. Stella's voice shook slightly as she spoke.

"Bessie, you have behaved in a perfectly idiotic manner!" said Stella. "To write out such stupid rules as these—"

"You—you think they're stupid!" exclaimed Bessie.

"Certainly!"

"Oh dear!" Bessie Bunter blinked through her thick glasses. "Well, I—I've been coming to the conclusion myself that the girls are—are not really the right sort to understand them, you know. I think I'll drop the idea, and say nothing more about it."

Stella gaped as Bessie took back the paper. Poor Stella! She could not trust herself to words if she wanted to keep dignified.

"Under the circumstances, I shan't say any more about it," said Bessie Bunter. "I don't want to keep you from your meeting any longer. Good-evening, Stella, and thanks very much for pointing out that the girls wouldn't understand them!"

With that, Bessie Bunter scuttled for the door, and dived into the passage.

We laughed; we simply couldn't help it. We shook with laughter. And that's how Bessie behaved before the Council, and that's how she got out of her scrape. I'm beginning to revise my opinion of Bessie. It takes something more than a montress to deal with her—it does, really!



A DESPERATE CHASE! Mabs forced herself on with every ounce of energy she possessed, but the car roared along at a speed that grew greater every moment.

"That is all!" moaned the faint voice of Miss Matilda Breton. "I am so sorry! Dear me, how unfortunate! Bertha, my dear, if—if you could possibly assist me to my room—it is really the only place—one takes cold so quickly—"

"I'll help you at once, auntie!" cried Bertha, and now the other three were pressing forward to lend their assistance. "If you would like a doctor—" began Miss Steel.

"Oh, no, thanks!" muttered Aunt Tilly. "It is not necessary. I have had these attacks before. With a little rest they pass off. The excitement must have brought it on. I—I felt a little lightheaded all the evening!"

Bertha Breton was already assisting her to walk up the stairs. Her dragging step and painful movements stirred Miss Steel's compassion.

"As you are evidently not well, Miss Breton," she said, "I am sorry that I spoke as I did!"

Miss Matilda Breton gave her a pallid smile.

"I understand—I quite understand," she murmured.

The Cliff House girls watched them go. Miss Steel was moving off to her study. The "scene" was over!

"And there hasn't been such a stir, after all!" murmured Dolly Jobling.

"But there would have been!" was Clara's quick reply. "It beats me how fortunately that illness came on! Do you know what was going to happen? Miss Steel was going to tell her that she couldn't stay here as a giddy lodger in that room she's helped herself to. She was going to bundle her out!"

Another silence, and then Mabs burst out:

"And I believe she knew it, too, girls! I believe that illness is all put on! I think she was acting!"

"Oh, Mabs!" murmured Marjorie. "We know how horrid she has been to you; but, still—"

"I do believe it—I do!" Mabs said

recklessly. "There's something jolly queer about a woman who works such a senseless and mean jape in a theatre—and it isn't illness! Aunt Tilly wants to stop here for some reason! I'll jolly well find out that reason before I've done!"

Aunt Tilly's "Jape!"

BUT the illness of Aunt Tilly, real or assumed, did not end as unexpectedly as it started.

All through the Sunday that followed she remained in her room, and meals were brought to her. Bertha Breton & Co. more or less lived in the room, and the Cliff House girls had few opportunities of speaking to them. When they did, however, question them about the car, it was to receive such emphatic denials that they dropped the subject—for the time being!

"They deny it, of course," said Mabs indignantly, "because they know where Lorna Mantion is, and they're still trying to hide her!"

Aunt Tilly was still "queer" on Monday morning, but she was seen moving about the school at dinner-time. When the meal was over, she made her way to Miss Primrose's study. Clara Trevlyn saw her come out.

"I don't know what's happened," she said, when she met the others in the quadrangle. "Never seen anyone buck up so much in all my life as Aunt Tilly has done. Looks as though she's found a five-pound note!"

"I suppose she's told Miss Primrose some tale, and explained away what happened on Saturday night!" said Mabel Lynn moodily.

"Mabs, you are bitter!" exclaimed Gwen Cook.

"Perhaps I am; but I simply can't stand the woman!" said Mabs flatly. "I met her in the passage just now, and she gave me that horrid, sarcastic grin of hers. I could have shaken her for it! I tell you I think she's horrid

and cunning, and worse than Bertha and the others! I wish I'd been able to have a few words when she was talking to Miss Primrose!"

Exactly what had passed between the headmistress and the queer visitor to Cliff House, however, came as a shock to all the Fourth, Gwen included.

Classes were just finishing that afternoon when Miss Primrose came into the Fourth Form class-room.

"I have a little announcement to make," she said. "Mrs. Hartley, unfortunately, has a rather severe cold, and has written to me to say that she cannot come to give you a little Guide chat this evening. But you will be delighted to know that I have made another arrangement."

Miss Primrose smiled on her amazed and disappointed scholars.

"Instead of the Guide meeting I have arranged that you shall hear a little talk on South Africa," went on the headmistress. "Miss Breton has kindly promised to chat with you in the Common-room for half an hour."

"Miss Breton?" gasped Mabel Lynn. "I see you are surprised!" said Miss Primrose genially. "I admit that I had to press Miss Breton before she would consent, and she has asked me to tell you that she is not an accomplished lecturer. I must say, however, that she will be bound to interest you. Of course, I need hardly ask you to give her a fair and patient hearing?"

The Fourth-Formers went up to tea, their heads whirling.

"A—a lecture from Aunt Tilly!" groaned Babs. "Oh, my goodness! What ever will happen next? We can't escape the woman at all!"

Bertha Breton came into Study No. 4, chuckling.

"Auntie'll keep you in order all right!" she grinned.

"Oh, bother your aunt!" burst out Mabs. "It's like her cheek to push herself forward like this! Who asked her to have anything to do with us?"

"Miss Primrose—that's all!" said Bertha airily. "You're jolly slow getting the tea ready to-night!"

"Think we're getting it ready for your benefit?" exclaimed Mabs. "I notice that you never lend a hand!"

"Oh, don't argue!" said Bertha peevishly. "We told you we should keep our end up here, and we jolly well have! Ha, ha, ha! You're only jealous because you haven't got a rich aunt to take you out whenever she thinks she will, and let you enjoy yourself!"

Mabs was too angry even to reply to that. She said nothing to Bertha during the meal. Her look conveyed far more than words when, a little later, Bertha looked into the study and announced cheerily that her aunt was waiting for them.

"We'd better go, Mabs," said Babs, rising. "It's to please Miss Prim. She won't like it if any of us stay away."

"What are we going for, I wonder?" Mabs returned, as she rose. "More funny remarks, I suppose, and that awful chuckle! My word, I sha'n't stand much of it to-night!"

Most of the girls were in the Common-room when the chums of Study No. 4 appeared. Aunt Tilly, seated on a chair, and looking fully recovered, gave them a somewhat severe glance through her pince-nez.

"Rather late—what?" she said. "Been working some more little japes, Mabel Lynn?"

"I've come to hear about South Africa—not japes!" said Mabs hotly.

"Dear me! How frightfully ill-mannered you can be!" exclaimed Aunt Tilly.

"You can't talk about japes, after what you did at the theatre—"

"That's it—reproach me for my action when I was not feeling myself!" interrupted Aunt Tilly. "You may call that fair play, of course—you have such strange ideas! Still, do not let us argue! I wonder if any of you know very much about South Africa? Can anyone tell me the capital of Cape Province? Can you, Mabel Lynn?"

Mabs stared.
"Good gracious, are you ignorant even of that?"

"Am I compelled to answer your questions?" cried Mabs.

"Of course! Miss Primrose told me to ask questions. Still, as you evidently do not know, I will pass on. Can you tell me, Bertha?"

"Cape Town," said Bertha promptly.

"Excellent!" cried Aunt Tilly. "Bertha, you may go up top! Yes, take that chair by the fire—that girl sitting in it go to the back, please!"

Phyllis Howell surrendered the chair with very bad grace, but Aunt Tilly did not seem to notice her look. She was proceeding to ask other questions. And then the Fourth-Formers saw her very first purpose.

One by one she was contriving to work her five favourites into the best chairs in the room. The girls were sure that she even accepted wrong answers rather than let Bertha & Co. fail in anything!

And the lecture. It did not seem that there was going to be a lecture at all. The questions went on—one after another. They were frequently repeated. For many of her questions Aunt Tilly seemed to have two different answers. And whatever the Fourth said was always wrong!

It was a "score"—a score deliberately planned by Aunt Tilly!

Why should Peggy be called dull-witted, and Babs stupid, and Augusta scatter-brained, if the extraordinary "lecturer" was not doing it purposely?

Why should all the easiest questions go to Bertha & Co., who sat in the best chairs by the fire, chuckling?

"Is Cape Town the oldest established city in South Africa, Bertha?" asked Miss Matilda.

"Oh, yes!" said Bertha.
"Splendid!" smiled Aunt Tilly. "You seem to know everything, my dear—just as though you had lived there with me. Why cannot you answer a question as quickly as that, Mabel Lynn?"

"It isn't a question when you give the answer with it," said Mabs angrily.

"Perhaps you were thinking out another little joke, eh?" said Aunt Tilly sweetly.

Mabs sprang to her feet.
"I've had enough of this!" she cried. "If you say any more about japing I shall get out. We were asked to come here to a lecture—not to play second fiddle to amuse your favourites!"

There was a sudden silence. No one knew quite what would happen. And then—

Miss Steel chose that very moment to enter the room.

"I am sorry to interrupt, Miss Breton," she said. "I have to go out of the school almost immediately. If you will excuse me for a moment I should just like to present four diplomas that have arrived by post from the head-mistress of Oakvale House. They are for pianoforte playing. Edna Green!"

"Yes, Miss Steel?"

"This is yours—you seem to have passed a very good examination," said the mistress. "Joyce Cantling, Grace Perry, and Alma Wright. I congratulate you all! I have one further diploma, but as that is for Lorna Manton, I will post it to her parents, with a letter."

"Lorna Manton!"
It was that cry from Aunt Tilly that made everyone stare at her.

She had risen from her chair and was facing Miss Steel with a sudden, nervous tightening of her hands and twitching lips!

"Yes," said Miss Steel, surprised.
"I—I'll take that, if you like, and—and give it to her, Miss Steel," said Aunt Tilly, making an obvious effort to control herself. "I—I am seeing Lorna Manton in a day or two."
"I regret—"

"As—as Lorna is an—old friend of Bertha's, I am making a special trip. I—I would love to take the diploma with me—"

"I am sorry, Miss Breton," interrupted Miss Steel quietly. "I appreciate the spirit of your offer, but it is my duty to see to it myself. It will be quite safe in the post."

"But—" said Aunt Tilly, and broke off.

She remained, standing rigidly, as Miss Steel went out of the door. The change in her was extraordinary. Everyone saw it.

"I'm glad!"
Those two words caused Aunt Tilly to wheel round as though she had been stung. She saw Mabel Lynn, still standing. It was Mabs who had spoken!

"Glad!" said Aunt Tilly faintly.

"Yes—because I know why you wanted that diploma!" Mabs cried. "You know where Lorna Manton is! You know that she isn't at home! And you're afraid of it being sent! There! Can you give me any answer now?"

The tension of the room was intense. Aunt Tilly forced words to her pale lips.

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Oh, yes, you do!" said Mabs recklessly. "You understand a lot more than you pretend to! You're on Lorna's side. But I hope that diploma is sent, and I hope her parents find out that she's not here!"

"Well done, Mabs!" cried Babs.

"Bravo!"
"I—I won't take this class any longer!" stammered Aunt Tilly. "Such remarks—and you all applaud them! It is a sheer waste of my time—"

"And ours!" said Clara Trevlyn.
"You insolent girl!" cried Miss Matilda Breton, striding to the door. "You will not find me in such a hurry to oblige again! I shall go to my room and read!"

Bang! went the door.
But the Common-room was in a ferment of excitement now.

"It's proof—absolute proof that she knows everything!" Mabs was declaring. "If only we could make her speak! But perhaps it will come out now that diploma's going to be sent on!"

No one noticed Bertha Breton leave the room. But she did so, and hurried along the passage. On an upper landing she came on her "aunt."

"You fool, Lorna!" she hissed. "You've nearly given it away this evening! Acting so madly, and letting them see how scared—"

"How could I know?" retorted the genuine voice of Lorna Manton. "I never guessed this. Those other letters that were written were lying on the mat at home, and I've got them. But this—I can't get hold of the diploma in the same way. Dad's sent his address to the post-office, and it'll be redirected without being delivered at home. What—what can I do?"

"You shouldn't have made Mabel so wild!" said Bertha moodily.

"Wild! Why not? Convince the others that she did it—that's my game! Besides, we want to score off them, and I was doing it beautifully until that Miss Steel turned up!"

"Fine pickle we're in now, anyway!" said Bertha.

"You can bluff out of it all right," said Lorna. "I'm in a worse one. I shouldn't come down again. I'm going to stay in my room and try and think of



IN DISGRACE! Mabs was led through the hall towards the cloak-room. She felt every eye upon her scarlet face as she walked along! For the second time she was in disgrace!

something. To-morrow— Ssssh! Someone coming!"

They parted instantly, and Lorna became Aunt Tilly again and walked on. But it was a false alarm. Just as she realised that an idea came to her mind—desperate, but perhaps the one she wanted.

Miss Steel was out. Supposing she went to her room and helped herself to the diploma! There would not be any posting of it then. Just the idea! she reflected. Inside this very door—

She tried the handle and gave a hollow groan of dismay. Miss Steel's door was locked, and the key gone!

The Spy at Night!

READY, girls?"

In the darkened Fourth Form dormitory that night there was a murmur of assent from almost every one of the girls in response to Barbara Redfern's question.

"Good!" Babs whispered. "Girls, we won't spare them! We'll show these Oakvale House girls that we can stick up for ourselves! They've gone a little too far this time! We're going to put them back in their place, once and for all!"

"And not before it's time, either!" muttered Clara Trevlyn. "Of course, they put their aunt up to ragging us! I expect they got her to go to Miss Primrose and suggest that she should pretend to give us a lecture! We'll give them a taste of Cliff House now!"

"This way!" whispered Babs.

She opened the door of the dormitory and padded silently along the passage that led to the room used by the Oakvale House girls. Behind her came more than half the Form. Some carried pillows; others were apparently unarmed. But all looked ready for business!

It was to be a night rag that Bertha & Co. would remember! It was going to teach them that the long-suffering Fourth considered the attentions paid to them by "auntie" to be more than the limit! It was going to bring them abruptly and uncomfortably to their senses!

"Ssssh!"

Babs had opened the door of their temporary dormitory at last, and was entering.

They knew the five beds they wanted. In the darkness they gathered round them.

"Now!" rapped out Babs.

Hands clutched the sleeping figures from every side.

"Oh! What the— What's the matter?" gasped Bertha's startled voice.

"Ooooh! What's happened?" panted Alma.

"Ssssh! It's just us, that's all!" Babs said.

Bertha stared at her with frightened eyes.

"You! My hat! If—if you don't go away I'll yell! He— Ooooh!"

Bump!

It was Clara Trevlyn's pillow that did that.

"Just a reminder!" said Babs grimly. "We don't want to hurt you, but we shall have to if you're not obedient! You've got to do what you're told!"

"What do you mean?" said Bertha, in a furious whisper. "If this is some jape of yours I will yell!"

"We'll see about that!" said Babs blithely. "A jape's all right as long as you work it, eh? When the boot's on the other foot you want to see Miss Steel! Well, if you sneak we'll tell Miss Steel just what happened to-night, and why we're here! Ah, I thought you'd change

your mind! Get up! We're going to have some more geography!"

Bertha protested, but the pillows were very convincing. The Oakvale House girls rose as directed.

"Put on your dressing-gowns; that's right!" said Babs. "Now you can squat on the floor! Bertha, what's the capital of Cape Province?"

"Cape Town!" said Bertha, with sulky fury.

"Give her one good mark, Clara!" said Babs approvingly.

And Clara did—a mark on her forehead with a piece of burnt cork!

"Oh!" gasped Bertha. She struggled. "Don't you d-d-dare—"



EXTRACTS FROM AUNTIE JONES' TUCKSHOP JOURNAL!

7.30 p.m.—Credit given to Miss Bunter for one shilling. Told me a very pitiful tale about being hungry and "needing to get up her strength." Was so much in earnest that I could not refuse such a small amount. While she was eating she had a lot to say about the ingratitude of girls, but I really could not understand what it was about. I think someone must have been ill-treating the poor girl, because she said that she was going to let everyone in the school quarrel as much as they liked, and she would laugh up her sleeve at them, and say it served them right.

7.45 p.m.—Large parcel sold to Miss Marjorie, Miss Clara, and Miss Dolly, containing cakes, etc. Total, 6s. 4½d.

7.50 p.m.—Parcel sold to Miss Phyllis and Miss Philippa, also containing cakes. Total, 4s. 3d.

7.55 p.m.—There seems to have been an absolute wave of remittances to-day. Just before closing I have had an order from Miss Gwendoline Cook for 2s. 6d.—more than she usually spends.

8.5 p.m.—Late closing to-night, but I really could not help it. The Third Form girls, released from preparation, came here in a body to buy up almost everything I had got. Most of them seemed to be complaining that they had had no tea. I had to interfere several times, or there would have been unruly arguments in the shop. I cannot get the rights of the matter, but they have evidently had some disagreement amongst themselves. I expect they have been cooking again; that is enough to account for anything.

8.15 p.m.—Closed at last! I can see through the shutters that Mr. Piper is hanging about, evidently wishing to "escort me across the dangerous quadrangle," as he puts it. He seems more concerned than ever for my safety, and I shall have to take him to task about it. That last piece of poetry that he wrote was most romantic!

But the poised pillow silenced her. Alma Wright was questioned next, and Alma refused to answer. For such a doleful lack of knowledge she was awarded three black marks—on her cheek!

There was another struggle at that, but it was equally unavailing.

"It's no good struggling," said Babs cheerfully. "You're only in the same position that we were. Now, Marie, where's Table Bay?"

"I—I don't know!" said Marie, her voice quivering.

"Clara, draw a map of it, please!" said Babs. And Clara complied willingly, drawing the map—on Marie's face!

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a soft chuckle.

"We'll make you sorry for this!" said

Bertha furiously. "If you call it a jape—"

"Just what we do call it, Bertha! You see, you can easily wash it all off when we've finished. It leaves a nice record in black and white of your cleverness."

"I won't answer another question!" vowed Bertha.

Babs winked at Mabs in the darkness. "That's serious," she said. "Mutiny, in fact! We had to answer your aunt's questions. Mabs, just fetch a stick of red grease-paint! We'll give her a mark with that whenever she doesn't answer. That'll take about half an hour longer to wash off!"

"Right-ho!" Mabs answered. "Topping idea!"

"You—you—" Bertha was saying.

Mabs glided away. They had no intention of using grease-paint, but Bertha & Co. wouldn't guess that! The sight of it would scare them into obedience, which was what Babs wanted.

Out into the passage Mabs went, and then—

She caught her breath and squeezed herself back against the wall.

That dark shadow! What was it? She was positive that she was not alone in the passage!

Who was about at that time of night, leaving that very passage?

The passage light fell on a familiar figure, and Mabs caught her breath afresh. She recognised instantly the dress of Bertha Breton's aunt!

Bertha Breton's aunt! Yes, and she was moving quickly, and with a more girlish step than Mabs had ever seen before. She must have come to see Bertha & Co., and witnessed the raggers at work! Perhaps that was why she was hurrying away!

Forgetting all about the grease-paint, Mabs hurried in pursuit. She would see what the woman was doing about the school at this time of night. The figure had disappeared down the stairs. Mabs followed.

She had turned the corner, her brain a whirl of queer guesses, when she suddenly stopped. What had she heard? She listened intently. It sounded like a cautious tapping. Now she was almost sure that she heard a whispering voice.

Running to the half-landing she peered down. A door was open, and from the doorway streamed a brilliant light. Her heart seemed to leap into her throat.

It was the door of Miss Steel's room that was open!

After that Mabel Lynn's movements seemed to lose all caution. She was up the stairs in a flash and speeding along to the new girls' dormitory. She hardly saw the humorous changes that Clara had worked in the girls' appearances during her absence.

"Quick!" said Mabs hoarsely. "Back to the dormitory at once! Miss Steel's coming!"

There was no need to repeat such a cry. The effect of it on the Fourth Formers was electrical. They grabbed their pillows, and forgot all about the girls they had been ragging. In a hurrying crowd they rushed back for their dormitory.

Too late!

"Stand still!" cried a voice suddenly. "I have seen you!"

A brilliant light clicked on, revealing Miss Steel in her dressing-gown.

"Ah! A pillow-fight!" Miss Steel exclaimed. "And at this time of night—half-past ten! You know that you are absolutely forbidden to leave your dormitory after lights-out. Return at once! For this you will all write two hundred lines! Now get into your beds!"

Miss Steel watched them return, dismayed and bewildered, to their beds.

Then she extinguished the light and closed the door.

"Two hundred lines! My hat!" muttered Clara. "Is it worth it, girls? I know it was a rag, but—"

"It isn't half as much as we might have got!" broke in Mabs, in a trembling voice. "We were nearly caught ragging the others. That was what was intended!"

"Intended?" said Babs incredulously. "But we weren't making a noise."

"I haven't explained yet," said Mabs bitterly. "Miss Steel didn't jump on us by accident, girls. Someone told her. Can you guess?"

"Someone told her?"

"Yes; I saw it! I know what happened! Girls, we were caught because Aunt Tilly went to Miss Steel's room and sneaked about us!"

And then Mabs told all, her voice trembling with indignation. It was such a mean and despicable action that some of them could hardly believe, at first, that Mabs had seen all she said.

"So Aunt Tilly sneaked—she sent Miss Steel after us!" Babs muttered. "Well, if that isn't the—the limit, I don't know what is! Sneaking to bring a mistress to catch us! Can you imagine anything more contemptible?"

The chorus of voices in the dormitory showed that there were even stronger opinions than the one Babs had voiced. Clara was for going down and interviewing Aunt Tilly there and then.

"That wouldn't be any good, Clara," Mabs answered. "She'd only yell. There's nothing that the woman won't do. And we'd be in a worse plight than ever. But we'll see her in the morning, and this time Aunt Tilly shall know what we think of her."

And they went to sleep at last, comforting themselves with that resolution. Aunt Tilly should hear about it in the morning!

Desperate!

AUNT TILLY was not to be found! The only information that the girls could glean on the following morning, after hunting everywhere, was from Piper, the porter, who said that Miss Breton had risen early and announced her intention of going for a long walk.

"Then it'll wait," said Mabel Lynn grimly. "Don't say a word to the others. We'll keep it as a surprise."

But Barbara Redfern saw the old depression stealing over her chum again. How disappointed she had been to receive no letter from home that morning! She tried to cheer her up, but it was difficult. Lorna Manton still evaded them; she seemed to have disappeared completely.

Miss Steel was waiting for them in the class-room.

"I have to report a most extraordinary happening," she said sternly. "I have never known such a thing to happen before. Last night there was a diploma in my room, made out in the name of Lorna Manton. This morning it is missing. The girl who must have entered my room while I was asleep is to step forward!"

There was utter silence in the room. Lorna Manton's diploma had disappeared! Mabs felt her heart pounding. Disappeared! And she had been hoping that its arrival at Lorna's home would lead to the girl's discovery.

"I am waiting for the guilty girl to confess!" announced Miss Steel. "I regard the matter as very serious. I do not wish to have to go to Miss Primrose!"

Another silence.

"Where had it gone?" Mabs asked herself. "Who had taken it? Bertha Breton, Marie, or Alma?"

A daring suspicion darted into her brain. Aunt Tilly!

"I shall grant one more minute for consideration," announced Miss Steel. "I warn the girl very solemnly that it will be better for her to speak!"

The minute began to tick by.

"Aunt Tilly?" Mabs asked herself again.

It was possible. Yes, and she could see a way, too. But the whole thing was so dazzling that Mabs resolved to mention that suspicion to no one—not even Babs. The time would come.

"Very well!" said Miss Steel. "I shall make my report to the head-mistress. I am sorry to think that there



TWO LETTERS TO THE FOURTH FORM CAPTAIN!

Dear Barbara,—Once again I see that you have been attempting to poke fun at me in the pages of the "Cliff House Weekly."

"You seem to imagine that you can say what you like about Fifth Form girls, but you will soon find out that you are mistaken. You seem to forget entirely that I am a member of a higher Form, and I say most emphatically that all my hobbies are most successful, and I won't be made fun of in the manner that you choose—so there!

Doubtless you will be very sorry for this before long!
ANGELICA JELLY.

Barbara Redfern.—Take warning! You have thought fit to make fun of a Form in every way your superior.

One of your number has been allowed to behave in a disrespectful manner towards us.

You are going to be very sorry for this before long, so take this warning, and accept your punishment meekly. Remember that we do not forget!

(Signed) THE NEVER-FORGETERS.

Clara Trevely's comment on the two of them:

Both written by Angelica Jelly without a doubt. Evidently she's trying to organise some rag on us, and it's bound to prove most amusing with Angelica to captain it. The warning could not possibly have come from the Third, as Bessie seems to think for some queer reason, because they've spelt the word "disrespectful" correctly!

is a girl in the class so lost to a sense of honour!"

Lessons proceeded, but there was an undercurrent of excitement in the Form. They discussed the queer event at the interval, and also during Mademoiselle Lupin's French lesson. But Mabs made few comments.

Dinner came, still without any sign of Miss Matilda Breton. The chums of Study No. 4 were in their room when at last they heard her drawing voice in the passage, speaking to Bertha & Co.

"Now for it!" Babs muttered. And the chums of Study No. 4 rose as one.

They went out into the passage—not the only ones by any means.

"We want to have a few words with you, Miss Breton," said Babs evenly.

Aunt Tilly seemed to give a slight start. Her eyes lit on Mabs. She spoke as though trying to create a diversion.

"Why, here's Mabel! Ha, ha, ha!"

The aggravating chuckle sent the blood to Mabel's cheeks. "Why are you looking so serious, my dear? No more little japes—eh, what?"

"I'll ask you not to speak of my chum in that way," Babs cut in. "Miss Breton, we want to speak to you about what happened last night. We accuse you of sneaking!"

"Sneaking?" said Aunt Tilly, giving a violent start. "My—my—Dear me! What—that do you mean?"

"You know!" Babs retorted. "And whether you're Bertha's aunt or not, I'm going to say it! We think that it was absolutely mean and horrid of you to go to Miss Steel as you did! If that's your idea of a score, it isn't ours, I can tell you! We've never been played such a horrid trick by anyone before, and it isn't your fault that we didn't suffer more!"

They had never seen Aunt Tilly look so scared as she did just then.

As for Bertha & Co., they looked as though they could have fallen on the chums of the Fourth.

"You're talking riddles!" said Aunt Tilly faintly. "Me—go to Miss Steel? Why—why should I want to do such a thing?"

Mabel Lynn stepped forward. Her burning eyes gazed at the extraordinary aunt.

"I'll tell you!" she said. "It wasn't only to back up Bertha and the others. You wanted to see Miss Steel out of her room!"

"What?" cried the other hoarsely.

"We all know what's happened!" Mabs went on rapidly. "Lorna Manton's diploma has gone. It went last night. Someone took it. That's why you were so ready to send Miss Steel after us, Miss Breton!"

Aunt Tilly was quivering.

"I—I think you must be mad—"

"Not mad!" cried Mabs, taking a step forward. "Just a bit smarter than you seem to think we are! Lorna Manton's certificate went last night, and I accuse you of taking it! Now, what have you to say?"

"You must be out of your senses!" put in Bertha Breton, in a blustering, quivering voice.

Mabs ignored her.

"Let Aunt Tilly answer—if she can!"

Aunt Tilly shook.

"You—you are making an absolutely unfounded charge against me!" she forced herself to say. "I—I never heard of such a thing before! To even hint that—"

"Are you prepared for me to go to Miss Steel and say this?" Mabs cried.

"No, I can see you're not! You haven't let it go farther. But I'm going to see that something does happen! If Lorna Manton's diploma isn't returned to Miss Steel's room to-day I'll tell all I know!"

"All—all you know?" gasped the other.

"Yes! And that's a lot, too!" Mabs cried. "You know that Bertha's friend Lorna is responsible for what happened in Courtfield. Don't try to deny it! That's why you've made all those remarks to me! I believe you were at Lorna's house on Saturday, and you know where she's hiding now! I don't believe you were ill on Saturday night at all! You've been working tooth and nail for Bertha and these others against me! Don't think I'll stand it any longer, because I won't! I've been accused of what Lorna did, and I'm innocent! I'll prove it, and neither you nor anyone else shall stop me!"

Dead silence followed that dramatic outburst. And then it was Bessie Bunter who spoke.

"Quite right, Mabs! Just what I've

been thinking myself!" she squeaked. "That's the way to talk to her! And, I say, I think we jolly well ought to punish her for what happened last night! You hold her, Mabs, and I'll jolly well pull her hair!"

Aunt Tilly shrieked. "Don't you dare to touch me!"

Mabs stared, more amazed than ever, as Aunt Tilly stood with her back to the wall, panting.

"Good gracious! What ever's the matter now?" she cried.

"I—I won't have such threats made against me!" panted Aunt Tilly. "I—I'll have some of you girls caned if you don't treat me with more respect! I will see your headmistress—"

"Miss Primrose is just coming up the stairs!" whispered Katie Smith's excited voice.

There was utter silence at that, and in it they heard the sound of quiet footsteps.

True enough, it was Miss Primrose who appeared at the end of the passage!

But Aunt Tilly did not move forward to make a complaint. She stood against the wall, looking more fearful than ever.

"Girls, I have come to make a rather pleasant announcement to you," Miss Primrose exclaimed. "This afternoon is to be a half-holiday so that you can all go to Friardale. I will explain—"

Some of them hardly heard the rest of Miss Primrose's explanation. They were

watching Aunt Tilly. She had seen her chance, and was taking it.

While the headmistress spoke to them she was slinking away!

Going away, without a murmur of protest against the things said to her!

And, indeed, Lorna Manton could hardly have trusted herself to words at that moment. As soon as she was out of sight she ran for the bed-room that she had made her own at Cliff House. There she sank to a chair, and buried her face in her hands. She was quivering with fear!

A long while seemed to pass, and then she heard footsteps. She started guiltily up. But it was Bertha Breton who entered, and locked the door behind her.

"You're in a fine pickle now!" Bertha Breton almost hissed.

"They—they don't really suspect the truth, do they?" gasped the voice of Lorna Manton.

"Not yet. But they will next!" Bertha answered. "What else can they think? I warned you that it was carrying things too far to jape them as you did last night. As for taking that diploma—"

"I had to!" answered Lorna, with trembling irritation. "Don't be so silly! What else could a girl do? Any risk was better than my people knowing. I didn't know that Mabel Lynn would see me, and—and that she'd guessed so much!"

An uneasy silence fell. "Well, what are you going to do?" asked Bertha, at length.

"I—I don't know!" muttered Lorna. "It almost looks as though the game is up. I'm sorry now that I ever left that old tower; I could still have been disguised when I came out with you. Anyway, I don't think I shall have the chance of stopping here much longer. That Miss Steel's a prig, and hates me. When I told her last night about the rag she looked awfully contemptuous, but had to go and see what was the matter, of course. I wish I'd come here as myself in the first case and risked it!"

"It's Mabel Lynn at the bottom of everything. She's your enemy!" said Bertha.

"I know," answered Lorna nervously. "I suppose she'll be here in a minute."

"No. We're all going to the village, and they're getting ready now. There's a bazaar on, or something like that, and the Fourth have been invited to go down and sing that stupid song they've been learning. You won't see Mabel yet."

"Then there's a chance!" said Lorna, a sudden light in her eyes.

"A chance? How?" ejaculated Bertha.

"Listen!" said Lorna breathlessly. "It's Mabel's word against mine at present. They believe her. I haven't been able to shake their faith in her. But supposing something fresh happened—something at this bazaar! There'll be a chance for me to do something, I'm sure! Yes, I'll come with you, and I'll manage to get in all right!"

Her eyes were shining.

"See, Bertha? There's a doubt about Mabs, and they're giving her the benefit of it at present! But if she gets into some fresh disgrace they'll all turn against her and feel sure that it's all a made-up story about Courtfield! Then she can say what she likes against me, and no one will listen! She's the only one who saw me at my home. She's the only one who saw me last night!"

"My hat!" breathed Bertha. "It's— it's rather risky—"

"Risky?" said Lorna. "Phew! Think I care for a risk now? I'm in a tight corner. It's Mabel or I—one of us is in for it. And I'm going to see that it's Mabel Lynn!"

MISS STEEL'S MISTAKE

The Story of a Most Eventful Night. By MABEL LYNN.

"If the Fifth are getting cheeky again," said Babs, "the only thing is to take them in hand first! I suggest a good old pillow-rag. We haven't had one for a long while!"

"Agreed!" came the chorus.

The Fifth do have to be put in their place at times. Especially do they have to be looked after when they send threats through Angelica Jelly, the accepted duffer of the Fifth. We simply can't stand that sort of thing from Angelica!

It seemed quite clear to us that the two letters that had caused such speculation in the Fourth that evening were both from Angelica. Lucy Morgan, who fancies herself as a handwriting expert, was perfectly certain that they had both been written by the same hand. I don't say that we always accept Lucy's word unquestionably in such matters, but there seemed a reasonable probability that she was right this time. "Come on!" urged Clara Trevlyn. "If the Fifth are going to rag us it will be with pillows. They can never think of anything else! We'll get there first!"

So we sallied out of the dormitory, when all was quiet, with that laudable intention of teaching the Fifth a lesson. Marcia, Nancy, and Hetty stayed in bed, of course; but they always do that sort of thing.

"This way!" said Babs, and we steered for the Fifth Form dormitory.

I don't know who it was who first raised the alarm. I believe it was Dolly—Dolly is usually last, having forgotten her pillow or something—who passed the startling whisper round.

"The Third!" she hissed at us. "Don't breathe a word! Just come and watch!"

That happened when we had turned the corner, and were just outside the Fifth Form dormitory. Impressed by the excitement of the message given to us, however, we retraced our steps. From a dark corner of the passage we were able to watch a wholly unexpected sight!

Sixteen Third-Formers, armed with pillows, were stealthily entering the dormitory we had just left!

We stood quite still, hardly daring to breathe, until the last one had disappeared inside.

"The Third—after all!" breathed Babs.

Clara was nodding.

"Yes, that message couldn't have been from the Fifth! My hat! What a shock they'll have when they find all our beds empty!"

Babs gripped her pillow lovingly.

"Shall we just steal in and take them by surprise?" she whispered.

"Rather!"

"That's just the idea!"

But we didn't go forward. At the very moment that we had come to that decision, there came a most surprising and alarming sound—a firm and heavy tread on the stairs leading from below. We knew it instantly.

Miss Steel!

"My hat!" muttered Clara, while we paused, simply not knowing what to do.

A scared face appeared at the door of our dormitory and looked out. It was Madge Stevens. She, apparently, had heard. Perhaps she saw Miss Steel. Anyway, the quick whisper that left her lips reached us quite distinctly.

"It's Miss Steel coming, girls! Into their beds quick!"

Madge disappeared and the door closed gently. We heard Miss Steel draw rapidly nearer, and we waited. By returning to our dormitory then we knew that we should only make a row certain. But what an extraordinary position it was going to be if the Third were discovered in our beds!

Hardly daring to peep around the dark corner, we watched Miss Steel pause outside our dormitory. She opened the door, and looked inside. We waited, with fluttering hearts. Then she came out again. The door closed. Miss Steel disappeared!

"It's worked!" breathed Clara ecstatically.

Babs chuckled.

"Yes, thanks to the Third!" she said. "And now, girls, we'll just give them a little lesson not to send us threatening notes in the future, eh?"

"Rather!"

We gathered, ready for the attack.

After a short pause the door of our dormitory opened, and Madge Stevens & Co. began to come out. We gave them enough time to reach the passage, and then revealed ourselves.

"Charge!" whispered Babs.

We charged!

It was the most precipitate flight of the Third that I have ever seen. They didn't even stay to exchange one bang with a pillow as we swept on them.

But we were merciful. We had to be! After all, we couldn't be hard on them when they had appeared so kindly, and saved us from the wrath of Miss Steel! We had kept up the dignity of the Fourth, and that was all we wanted to do!

"I Cannot Believe You!"

MABEL LYNN was amazed beyond measure to see Aunt Tilly join the Oakvale girls before they left the school; and such a different Aunt Tilly, too, with all her old confidence!

She spoke a word to Miss Primrose, who was accompanying the girls to the village, and then joined Bertha & Co. Heedless of the looks of all of them, she laughed and chatted, as self-assured as she had ever been.

What did it mean?

Mabs could offer no explanation at all. She felt that she had had Aunt Tilly in a tight corner, and Aunt Tilly had, by sheer bad luck, escaped. Mabs had certainly not expected her to join the party going to the bazaar.

"Something's happened to buck her up!" whispered Barbara Redfern.

Mabs nodded.

"But I'll make another opportunity of having it out with her!" she breathed. "There's more in Aunt Tilly than we guess. I'll find out what it is before very long!"

They could see the gay decorations outside the hall that they were to visit. Miss Primrose went hurrying forward to announce that her pupils had arrived. A lady appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, I say!" gasped Bessie Bunter. "See who it is!"

And Mabel Lynn found herself staring at Lady Barling!

"You!" muttered her ladyship. Mabs felt a flush creeping into her cheeks as Lady Barling turned quickly from her to Miss Primrose.

"It is very kind indeed of you to come down, Miss Primrose," she said. She raised her hand and pointed. "But that girl there—Mabel Lynn—she is not going to enter this building!"

Mabs felt the blood of anger mount to her cheeks.

"Oh, Lady Barling, you cannot mean that!" cried Miss Primrose.

"Yes! I cannot forget about Court-field—"

"The case was not proved, and I believe implicitly in Mabel!" said Miss Primrose indignantly. "I should not think of sending one of my girls back again. If Mabel cannot enter, then—then none of us must!"

Lady Barling inclined her head.

"Very good. In that case, I suppose I must allow Mabel Lynn to enter. But it is under protest that I do so!"

"Come in, girls!" Miss Primrose invited them.

But Mabs entered with a deeper flush than ever. That hard, unforgiving face, those scornful, contemptuous eyes! She wished she had never left the school. Admitted on sufferance—yes, that was all! Lady Barling's friends would know. They would all be watching her!

She hated herself as she walked about amongst the gaily decorated stalls.

But Mabs had at least one distraction.

The concert part of the programme was not yet due to start, and Bessie Bunter had not proved such a trial to Babs and Mabs for days! Her chums had already come to the conclusion that Bessie with money was really worse than Bessie without any.

"Think I could nip out and draw five pounds out of the post-office, Babs?" she asked once. "I've just seen such a ripping dressing-gown!"

No sooner was Bessie convinced that she didn't want it than her eyes lit on something else—something she simply must have! Hot-water bottles, bed-socks, blotting-pads, and writing-paper. Bessie wanted them all!

THE MIDNIGHT FEAST

By PHYLLIS HOWELL (Fourth Form).

IT was all Bessie Bunter's idea—feasts usually are! Bessie Bunter took advantage of the general wakefulness of the dormitory to put forward her ideas. Most of us were still congratulating ourselves on how luck had aided us to put the Third to flight. Bessie wanted the congratulations to take a more practical turn.

"In my honour, you know!" she said, having exhausted all her other arguments. "I'm really meant to jape us because I made them look so small when they were quarrelling about their cookery! A midnight feast would be just the thing!"

"But where's the grub, Bessie?" asked Babs.

That was what did it.

Clara spoke up to say that Study No. 7 had been shopping rather heavily that evening. Flap and I had to add that we had been doing the same, and so had Gwen Cook!

"But we'll have to be careful!" Babs explained. "I don't see why we shouldn't have an M.F. at all—we haven't had one for long enough! But as the Bull's room is next door to the dormitory, on account of her usual one being done up—"

"The Bull won't be coming to bed for long enough yet!" said Clara easily. "Kim on!"

"We 'kimm'd"—I hope it's the right word! A party of about seven of us, clad in slippers and dressing-gowns, stole softly from the dormitory, and tiptoed downstairs on a foraging expedition.

"My hat! What's that?" ejaculated Clara Trevlyn suddenly.

Marjorie stopped, and gave us a rather uneasy look.

"It sounds like—like banging!" she volunteered.

From somewhere below there came a steady thump, thump, thump! It seemed to grow louder as we progressed.

"Perhaps it's a bib-bib-burglar!" said Bessie nervously.

"What, a burglar making all that noise?" said Clara scornfully.

"Ssssssh!" said Dolly Jobling quickly. "I saw someone following us! It looked suspiciously like Mary Patterson of the Sixth!"

"My hat! Where did you see her?" gasped Clara.

"Just at the end of the corridor!" said Dolly. "She's darted out of sight now; but she must have been following us. Perhaps she saw us leave the dormitory!"

It wasn't a very cheerful position to be in. The thumping below sounded louder than ever. Mary was behind us. We were between two fires! A midnight feast seemed quite impossible, under the circumstances. A few jolly good impositions would probably end the whole affair!

Thump, thump! Bang! Bang!

"I'm going down to see what it is!" said Babs decidedly. "If we go back we'll only fall into Mary's arms! Come on!"

So we went—not without having to coax Bessie.

"Look! Oh, my word! Look what it is!" Babs exclaimed suddenly. And we nearly had to laugh aloud!

The explanation was very simple, after all!

It was the door of Miss Bullivant's study that was making such a noise.

The door opens outwards, but outside the door was a huge packing-case of books that had come that evening. The last time we had seen that case it had been standing at the top of two or three steps close to the study. Apparently—by accident, or design!—that packing-case had slipped. It was right against the door, rendering it quite impossible for anyone in the study to escape.

"Help! Piper! Duty monitress!" we heard Miss Bullivant's voice exclaiming. "Help! I can't get out!"

"All right, Miss Bullivant!" answered Babs.

We all lent a hand. Under our united efforts the door was quickly freed. Miss Bullivant blinked at us in amazement.

"Good gracious! I am very—"

"What are you doing here?" demanded an interrupting voice.

It was Mary Patterson who came striding on the scene.

Miss Bullivant fortunately intervened. She showed herself to Mary, and started to explain. Miss Bullivant has a loud voice, but it is not loud enough for Mary's ears. She nearly had to shriek to make Mary understand, and the sight of the Bull shrieking such information to Mary was really very funny indeed. But Mary understood at last, and had to admit she had heard nothing of the banging. And then she departed.

Then Miss Bullivant thanked us.

"It has proved a most annoying accident!" she said. "I have been trying for twenty minutes to make someone hear. Thank you very much for coming down. Now you had better go back to bed, or you will be catching cold. I have quite an hour's work ahead of me yet.

We departed—very cheerfully.

"An hour's work for the Bull, and Mary, the duty monitress, gone to bed!" said Babs, in a thoughtful voice. "H'm! I don't think a midnight feast would be at all dangerous, under the circumstances!"

"Thank goodness the concert's going to start now!" said Babs suddenly.

"Bessie will have something else to think about. Have you heard that Lady Barling is going to give a turn, Mabs? I believe she's rather fancies herself, and makes up."

"I don't want to see her turn, anyway," said Mabs dejectedly. "I haven't forgotten that look she gave me, Babs! How can I ever hope to convince her unless I find Lorna Manton? And I look less like doing that now than ever!"

Their time came, and they all went on the stage and sang. After enthusiastic

applause they gave an encore, and then left the stage again.

Slipping, just as she was descending the last step, Mabel Lynn nearly bumped into—Lady Barling!

"Oh, sorry!" Mabs gasped.

Their eyes met, but only for a second. Lady Barling turned away from her, and went into a small room at the side of the stage, saying not a word!

"Her dressing-room, you know!" commented Bessie Bunter, who quickly got to know everything wherever she went.

"I suppose she thinks I did that purposely!" was Mabel Lynn's sharp comment. "Well, she can if she likes!"

More turns were given, and then there was a delay. Then Miss Primrose approached Mabs, and asked if she would recite.

Mabel Lynn did so readily, and was received cordially. She lingered at the side of the stage during the applause that followed, then returned to give a short encore. The slight movement of one of the heavy curtains at the side of the stage did not catch her eye. Amazed indeed would Mabs have been to know that someone was hiding there—that two bright, desperate eyes watched her as she gave her encore!

"Bravo!"
"Well done!"

She left the stage again, hesitating as to whether to take a last "curtain call." In that brief moment the curtain moved. The figure that had remained hidden, seeing its opportunity, appeared. In a second Mabs might have turned and seen her, but she was not allowed that second. Arms seized her from behind.

Before she could be fully aware of what was happening she was whirled to one side. She struggled, and gave a little cry. But at the same moment the arms loosed their hold. A mighty push sent her staggering against something. She heard a crash, then was down on her knees. Behind her a door slammed.

At first she was utterly dazed by such a rough and unexpected attack. Then some memory seemed to come back to her; with a chill of horror, she remembered this room as the one Lady Barling had been using! Goodness, what had she done?

Mabel Lynn scrambled to her feet, and gazed wildly around her.

She had been pushed into this room and the door slammed behind her. A table had tilted; she must have bumped against it. But the damage! She started at it almost unbelievably.

There was a broken mirror, a wig, and scattered grease-paint. A handbag lay beside, and a pair of expensive gloves. Ink, from an overturned pot, that was soaking into everything!

All those things on the table against which she had bumped!

"I—I must do something!" Mabs muttered. "If I'm not quick everything will be ruined!"

She forgot her animosity to Lady Barling. Stooping quickly, she seized the bag. She laid her hands on the gloves to retrieve them as well—and then a voice spoke!

"Goodness gracious!"

Mabs turned, with crimson face, to see Lady Barling!

"Mabel Lynn!" her ladyship cried. The colour was coming to her cheeks in a swift flood. "Gracious, you wicked girl—to think that I find you here—"

"Lady Barling, there's been an accident!" Mabs exclaimed.

"An accident? Ridiculous! How can you expect—"

"Lady Barling, I will be heard!"

Mabs panted. "I was just outside, after finishing my turn, when someone pushed me in here. I didn't see who did it. But I fell against this table—"

"How do you think you can expect me to believe such a story as that?" cried her ladyship harshly. "Knowing what I do—knowing that you have reason to bear me a grudge—"

"I don't bear you a grudge!"

"And surely—goodness gracious, you cannot deny having heard me say that I intended to go home to fetch a song that I had forgotten?"

"I've heard you say nothing like that, Lady Barling!" Mabs vowed.

"Then I don't believe you!" cried the other. "But for forgetting my gloves I should have been out of the hall now, and there would have been no one to catch you!" She gazed at the wreckage on the floor. "My make-up scattered and ruined, my bag and gloves inked! There is grease-paint on your fingers, too—"

"Yes—where I fell on the things!"

Lady Barling caught her arm suddenly.

"Mabel Lynn, you will confess to doing this instantly!" she cried.

"But it was an accident—"

"It was not an accident!"

"Very well, then—if you know better," Mabs could not help saying. "But I will not confess to something I haven't done!"

"I will see Miss Primrose instantly!"

Lady Barling dragged Mabs, rather than led her, from the room.

Her raised voice had apparently attracted attention, for at that very moment Miss Primrose appeared between the curtains.

"Miss Primrose—look!" Lady Barling cried. "This girl—look at what she has done, believing that I was to be away from my room for some time!"

"Oh, Mabel, how could you do such a thing?" cried Miss Primrose, in horror.

"I—I haven't done it!" said Mabs wildly. "Someone pushed me into the room!"

"Will you deny that I caught you with my gloves in your hand?"

"I was—"

"Probably you did not consider them inky enough!" said Lady Barling sarcastically.

"Oh, that is false!" protested poor Mabs, swept off her feet by all these charges. "I have not done this out of any feeling of revenge. I admit that I upset the table, but that was because someone pushed me, and I could not help it. Surely you will take my word, Miss Primrose?"

The startled girls, crowding in to see what had happened, saw the heavy expression that came over the headmistress' face.

"I think you would do better to confess, Mabel," she said.

"Confess?" Mabs recoiled. "But I am innocent, Miss Primrose!"

"Whom do you accuse if you are innocent, Mabel?" asked Miss Primrose sternly.

"I—I don't know!" faltered Mabs.

"There—that is proof of her wickedness!" cried Lady Barling.

Miss Primrose's eyes were flashing.

"Yes, Mabel. No one can believe that anyone would be so spiteful as to push you, as you tell us!" she exclaimed. "I know that you have a motive for what might be termed revenge—"

"But this is not revenge!" said Mabs desperately. "Miss Primrose, you must believe me—on my word of honour!"

"I took your word before, Mabel—in Courtfield," said Miss Primrose heavily. "Here, with such evidence against you—no, it is asking too much!"

Two figures came forward—Babs and Bessie Bunter!

"Miss Primrose, please—"

The headmistress silenced them with a gesture.

"Mabel Lynn, you are to return to the school at once!" she exclaimed. "I will deal with you on my return. First, however, you will apologise to Lady Barling."

"I cannot, when I am innocent!" quivered Mabs.

"I shall remember that!" said Miss Primrose grimly. "But no good will be served by prolonging this scene. You will go, Mabel, at once!"

"It isn't fair, Miss Primrose—" commenced Babs, but again she was cut short. Mabs was being led through the hall towards the cloak-room. She felt every eye on her scarlet face as she walked along! They guessed, from Miss Primrose's expression, what had happened to the girl who had just recited.

But she still had two friends. Babs and Bessie followed her, and insisted on having their own hats and coats. Fat but good-hearted Bessie wanted to draw all her money out of the post-office at once. Would that keep Lady Barling quiet, did they think? Bessie, in her own innocent way, was almost positive that it would!


So they went back to Cliff House. So dramatically and suddenly had the blow fallen that even now they could hardly believe that it was true.

Mabs accused again by Lady Barling—and this time Miss Primrose did not take her word! Would she ever vindicate

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herself now? Could she ever hope to clear her name? And she had been so near—so very near to it—before this last blow fell!

Two Letters!

BACK again in Study No. 4, and here the three chums sat in a dejected circle about the smoking fire.

The storm had yet to break about Mabs in all its fury. There would be a scene when Miss Primrose returned. Mabs would be punished. What ever sort of punishment would be awarded to her?

"Oh, look!" cried Bessie Bunter suddenly. "A letter on the mantelpiece, and we never saw it! Why, it's for you, Mabs!"

Mabs took the letter, and gave a cry. "It's from dad—at last!"

They saw her trembling finger slitting open the envelope. Inside was a single sheet of closely-written paper. Mabs started to read. Her breathing became suddenly quicker. And then the tears started to her eyes, and blotted her vision so that she had to turn away.

"Oh, Babs, it's from daddy!" said Mabs brokenly. "He's received my letter, and—and he still trusts me! He says they were not shocked at getting that bill, because they were so sure there was some mistake! Babs, he says he'll pay if he's forced, but he'll feel sure that he isn't paying it for me!" Her voice choked, and she found it hard to go on. "Oh, what will he say when he hears of what I'm accused of doing this afternoon, Babs?"

Babs had risen. Her arm was round her chum's shoulders.

"Bear up, Mabs," she whispered. "We believe in you, and so will the others! Your dad will still believe in you, too, never fear that!"

"Oh, rather!" sniffed Bessie Bunter, plishing her glasses vigorously.

Mabs dabbed at her eyes.

"Thanks, Babs! Thanks, Bessie!" she muttered. "I—I oughtn't to cry like this. I know that I've done nothing to be ashamed of. I—I was thinking of mother and dad, that's all!"

She finished reading her letter, her lips tight. Every now and then she had to pause. She could not help the tears starting to her eyes as she read the cheery, trusting words of the father who would believe nothing against her.

Miss Steel, looking very grim, came to the study.

"Mabel Lynn," she exclaimed, "I have been told to tell you that you are not to leave the school! Miss Primrose will be seeing you in her study as soon as she is ready!"

There was another silence after the door had closed.

"Oh, I wish I had thought of searching while I was still in that hall!" Mabs cried suddenly. "I remember now what a lot of curtains there were round the stage. Anyone might have hidden there, and been still in hiding when I was caught! But it's too late now! If Miss Primrose won't believe me I can do nothing!"

Again the suspense that was almost worse than the interview that must come so soon. Then there was another tap, and when Boker appeared Mabs felt that it really must be the summons she was expecting.

But Boker produced a letter. "Young gel brought this to the gates,

miss," he said. "It's for the young lady that—that got into a bit of a scrape this afternoon, that's what I was told. Can I leave it with you, Miss Redfern?"

"Certainly, Boker!"

Mabs took the letter as the door closed.

"From someone who doesn't even know my name!" she breathed. "That's awfully queer! I wonder what it can be!"

She slit open the unaddressed envelope, and drew out a slip of paper from inside. At the almost unbelievable message inside she first of all blinked her eyes, as though she felt she was dreaming. Then a wild cry of excitement left her lips.

"Babs! Oh, Babs! See that?" she cried.

Babs took the slip, while Bessie Bunter craned forward to read it as well.

"It's from someone employed at the hall this afternoon!" Mabs had to tell them. "She saw what happened and she

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says that possibly she could give important information that might clear up a mistake! What can it mean, Babs?"

Babs looked from the letter, her blue eyes dancing.

"Why, Mabs, it may be from someone who saw the person who pushed you into the room!" she cried. "She may have written this letter to get a reward. But even so—"

"I'm going down to see her now!" Mabs ejaculated, leaping to her feet. "Perhaps if we delay it will be too late."

Babs and Bessie were on their feet as well, reaching for their coats.

Not one of them saw the door slowly close and heard the faint click of the latch. But it did. For the last few seconds it had been ajar.

Out in the passage a figure was trembling with fear. Babs and Mabs would have recognised "Aunt Tilly"—the disguise that hid Lorna Manton from their eyes—if only they had looked out then.

"Someone in the village—someone who saw me!" Lorna quavered. "And I was just going in to see how much they had guessed when I heard all that!

They'll go down there. I'll be suspected, and perhaps caught, after all! I wondered at the queer look that woman gave me!"

She darted away as she heard sounds of movement in Study No. 4. At the end of the passage she hid behind an open door. Babs, Mabs, and Bessie were coming along.

"Someone who saw the person who pushed you, you can depend upon it!" Babs was exclaiming.

"I do hope she's positive!"

"She must be—sending that letter!" Babs answered. "Oh, come on, dear; I feel like running all the way!"

Lorna Manton heard them rattle down the stairs. She heard a yell from Bessie and her customary clatter as she slipped down the last two or three steps. She did not heed it.

"I must follow them—I must find out what that woman tells them!" Lorna panted.

Another thought made her tremble more than ever as she went softly down the stairs.

"But even if I wasn't actually seen, I don't know what I'm going to do!" she muttered, gaining the quadrangle. "What did I hear that Katie Smith just saying? She doesn't believe I'm their aunt at all, but just someone paid to come and play the part! It's too near the truth for my liking! Oh, if only I could come here as Lorna Manton! But I daren't!"

She did not risk going out through the gates. Instead, she sped across the dark quadrangle, and climbed the wall.

Babs, Mabs, and Bessie were hurrying along in front. She moved with too much caution for the three girls to suspect that they were being followed. And, twenty minutes later, when Babs and Mabs were at last in one of the smaller Friardale houses. Lorna Manton was outside the open window, listening to all that transpired!

"I am Lorna Manton!"

WHEREVER can Mabs be?" "There'll be an awful row for her when she comes back!" said Clara Trevlyn gloomily.

Mabel Lynn's disappearance had been discovered at last. Miss Primrose had sent for her, and had sent in vain. There had been quite a storm in the school. Miss Steel questioned the Fourth-Formers with a brow like thunder. Not one of them could tell her anything.

Since then, however, they had searched everywhere for Mabs. A party was clustered in the entrance hall, guessing that she must have gone out of the school against orders. Yet the minutes ticked by and nothing happened.

"And it's half-past seven!" muttered Clara. "Too late to save them all from being on the giddy carpet, I'm afraid. I—hallo! Who on earth is this?"

The door had opened, but not to admit Mabs.

A girl who was a stranger to the Cliff House girls had come into the entrance hall. She carried a travelling bag in each hand, and promptly dumped them down as though very tired.

"Whew! What a journey I've had!" she gasped.

Clara Trevlyn went forward.

"Are you a new girl?" she asked.

"Well, I suppose you'd call me that," the other answered. "Is Bertha Breton in?"

"I expect so," said Clara. "Are you from Oakvale House?"

"Yes," answered the newcomer. She paused, then said, very calmly: "My name's Lorna Manton!"

"L-Lorna Manton!" stuttered Clara Trevlyn.

It was like a bombshell to the girls in the entrance hall!

"Anything queer about it?" asked Lorna innocently. "It isn't a funny name—"

"You're Lorna Manton!" Clara gasped. "My hat! You're in for a merry time!"

"A merry time? How?"

Clara stared at her.

"I don't believe you can be Lorna Manton! Lorna wouldn't have the nerve to come here after all that's happened!"

"But I am Lorna Manton!" returned the girl. "What's the matter with you? Are you always like this?"

Clara blinked.

"Do you think we don't know what happened in Courtfield?" she cried.

"Eh?"

"And how you came on here and hid in the tower until last Friday?"

Lorna Manton placed her hands on her hips and surveyed Clara with great calmness.

"I don't know what you expect me to say to all that," she said. "You're talking riddles! Would you mind explaining it more fully?"

Clara did explain, with some warmth. She was astonished to see Lorna Manton's eyes open wider than ever.

"Well, that is interesting!" Lorna cried. "Ha, ha, ha! Where are the girls who have seen me so many times—who know all about this?"

"They—they're out at present," Clara said. "But—"

"Out! I should think they would be out!" said Lorna scornfully. "I—"

A figure came along the passage and stopped in amazement at the sight of the girl.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Miss Steel's voice.

"My name is Lorna Manton!" came the answer.

"Lorna Manton!" repeated Miss Steel. "Goodness gracious! Do you really mean that?"

"Oh, yes, miss," said Lorna. "My people got your letter—if you are Miss Steel," she added hastily, "but they had taken me away then."

"Where have you been for the last week?" exclaimed the mistress.

"Away with my parents," Lorna answered innocently. "I have a letter from my mother addressed to you, explaining that she thought it best for me to come here after all."

"This is extraordinary," said Miss Steel. "Come with me to my study, please!"

Miss Steel swept away and the new girl followed her. But the perplexity of the Fourth Form mistress was nothing to that of the others who knew so much!

"It must be Lorna Manton!" Clara gasped.

Phyllis Howell nodded.

"Yes, that's certain. She wouldn't have spoken to Miss Steel as she did if it wasn't true. But what does it mean? Why has she turned up here so boldly? Is it possible that her story is true?"

Gwen Cook nodded her head with great gravity.

"It must mean that Mabel Lynn's been mistaken all the time!" she said.

Clara blithely ignored that doubting solution and rubbed her hands.

"It's true that only Babs, Mabs, and Bessie have seen Lorna!" she said.

"But I'm quite certain, myself, that Lorna's the girl we've been after all the time! Wait until they come in!"

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 149.

"Do you really think so?" said Gwen.

"Do I think so?" echoed Clara.

"Why, of course! It's a big bluff on Lorna's part—what else can it be? She's been hiding away somewhere and she's getting afraid—perhaps she's heard about that diploma business. She's come back here with a letter and a plausible story hoping to take everyone in! But she won't take Babs and Mabs in!"

And after that the excitement became more intense than ever. Why didn't Babs and Mabs come back? Here it was getting on for eight o'clock, and they were still out of the school. Where were they? What had happened?

Miss Bullivant's appearance scattered Clara & Co. to their prep. But they worked in a very half-hearted manner.

They heard a voice at last, but it was the voice of Lorna Manton, the "new girl."

"Hallo, Bertha!"

And Bertha Breton's voice replied:

"My hat, it's Lorna! Why didn't you write and tell us you were coming, and we'd have met the train? Have you had a good time?"

"Topping, thanks!" Lorna answered.

"Settled down here now?"

"More or less!" Bertha answered.

"Sorry I can't introduce you to my study-mates, Babs and Mabs, but they're out."

"Mabs?" cried Lorna. "Have you got her? Why, I'm told that a girl named Mabs is looking for me, and going to bring all sorts of charges against me! I'm simply longing to meet her!"

Clara exchanged glances with Marjorie and Dolly.

"I still say she's bluffing!" Clara muttered doggedly.

"I wish Mabs would come in!" said Dolly Jobling, in a worried voice.

But the three chums of Study No. 4 did not come in. The evening wore on, and now there was a genuine anxiety in the Form. It was nearly supper-time. What ever could have happened to them?

And Lorna Manton, already making herself at home, was strutting about the passage, seeming to gain more confidence with every minute that passed.

"I think we ought to get out a search-party," said Clara suddenly. "Supposing we go and see Miss Steel, and suggest it to her?"

Several agreed with that. They were banding together when Miss Steel herself appeared in the passage.

"Miss Steel," said Clara, "we've had a chat, and—well, we're feeling rather anxious about Babs and Mabs and—"

"I have had news of them at last, Clara," said Miss Steel quietly. "The three missing girls are in the village, but they will not be returning to the school to-night."

"Not to-night?" gasped Clara.

"Perhaps not for more than a fortnight," was Miss Steel's astounding answer. "The fact of the matter is that Barbara, Mabel, and Bessie are in a house in Friardale where measles has broken out. They are in quarantine!"

"Babs and Mabs in quarantine!" gasped Clara.

"Miss Steel!"

"Surely it can't be possible!" echoed Phyllis Howell.

"That is my information," said Miss Steel. "I came to tell you, in case any of you were worried. Why these three girls are out is still a mystery, but they are safe for the present. The matter will be investigated later."

Miss Steel walked away. Breaking the silence in the passage came the disappointed voice of Lorna Manton.

"Then I sha'n't see this mysterious Mabs, after all!"

"You won't!" Bertha Breton said, and laughed suddenly. "Ha, ha, ha! You won't see her, but we'll have her room, which is better than her company, in my opinion! Lorna, we'll have Study No. 4 to ourselves now!"

Lorna sighed.

"I'm disappointed!" she said. "Still, we might have heard quite a different story when Mabel turned up and saw me."

She disappeared. Clara remained in the passage, staring. Clara seemed almost lost for words.

"Quarantine!" she muttered. "Why, it may mean a fortnight, or even three weeks, that they're away! We sha'n't be allowed to see them. They won't be allowed to come here until the doctor gives them a certificate. My hat!"

Phyllis Howell looked utterly dismayed.

"That's true!" she groaned. "And now Mabs and Lorna will never come face to face. Lorna will be gone before they come back. It'll remain a mystery, and Mabs will never be able to force the girl to clear her name!"

Clara gripped her arm in sudden excitement.

"And I believe Lorna knows that Babs and Mabs can't come—I do!" she whispered. "Oh, don't ask me how she's found out! It's too miraculous to be a mere coincidence. Lorna's found out in some manner that she can never be identified now, and that's why she's come to the school as she has done!" She clenched her hands impatiently. "And Lorna Manton's going to win—she's going to win, after all!"

To the Cliff House girls it seemed that Clara spoke the truth.

But at that very moment there was an extraordinary happening in the little house in Friardale where the three girls from Study No. 4 had become involuntary prisoners.

Mabel Lynn came racing up the stairs to the room where Babs and Bessie sat, plunged in considerable gloom.

"I've just seen the doctor, Babs!" Mabs cried, rushing to her chum's side.

"He's been again, and he says that the little boy may not have measles, after all! He's coming again to-morrow morning, and if it isn't measles we'll be able to go back to school!"

Babs leapt to her feet.

"You really mean it, Mabs?" she exclaimed.

"Yes. And I'll be able to take Mrs. Moxton with me, too. She says that she's positive that someone hid behind the curtain and pushed me into the room. She's going to describe that person, and that description will be the description of Aunt Tilly!"

"Hurrah!" Babs cried, capering.

"You'll be cleared, after all, Mabs! A real witness to prove your innocence! Oh, Mabs, I do hope it isn't measles!"

Little could Lorna Manton even guess that such a scene was being enacted in the house where she had listened and heard of the outbreak of sickness. If she had known she would not have gone to sleep with that triumphant smile on her face, thinking that the end of her troubles had come at last!

THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

(Next Thursday's issue of the SCHOOL FRIEND will contain "The Girl on the Farm!"—a magnificent new, long complete story of the girls of Cliff House, by Hilda Richards—a splendid long, complete story of the Girls of Danesford Hall, and numerous extracts from the "Cliff House Weekly." Order your copy at once!)

A Magnificent Story of the Girls of Greyhurst School!



JOAN HAVILAND'S SILENCE!

By JOY PHILLIPS

(Author of "The Girl Who Chose Riches!")



THE LEADING CHARACTERS.

JOAN HAVILAND, a poor scholarship girl, who formerly lived in Brick Row, in a London suburb.

RUBY HAVILAND, her sister, whose sudden accession to riches completely spoiled her.

ELSIE DAINTON, the friend of Joan.

HILDA HEATHCOTE, an excellent girl, and captain of the Fifth Form at Greyhurst School.

SYBIL SARDONE, **CLARICE CHOANE**, **OLIVE COURTNEY**, and **PHYLLIS FRANKLIN**, four "cronies," who formed a "set" at Greyhurst, and were bitterly opposed to Hilda Heathcote and her friends.

Joan and Ruby Haviland arrived at Greyhurst School separately—Joan with Elsie Dainton, Ruby with Sybil Sardone. Ruby had previously pressed Joan to keep silent as to their relationship.

From the first Sybil Sardone & Co. were down on Joan, though Hilda Heathcote and her chums befriended the scholarship girl. It was on account of this that Hilda became accused by her enemies of favouritism, and lost many of her friends.

In gallantly stopping a runaway horse, Hilda Heathcote met with an accident, and was taken to the sanatorium. The headmistress decreed that the Fifth Form must have a temporary captain until Hilda recovered. Elsie Dainton and Sybil Sardone were finally nominated as rival candidates for the captaincy.

Sybil Sardone threatened Ruby with the fact that she was already aware of her identity. In spite of this, Ruby bravely voted for Elsie Dainton, who defeated Sybil by one vote—Ruby's. Sybil Sardone was furious, and proclaimed to the school the relationship between Ruby and Joan Haviland. In view of this treatment of her scholarship sister, Ruby was shunned by the school.

(Now read on.)

A Terrible Catastrophe!

THE other girls who slept in the room were in bed at last, and the lights were switched off. But the four still talked on, keeping up their taunts and jeers about Ruby, the girl they had turned against.

"Bother the captaincy, and all captains, too!" Sybil herself was saying, a full hour after lights out. "Our own little set is good enough for me!"

"Won't we go ahead, too, after this!" chuckled Clarice. "I say, Syb darling!"

"Hallo?"

"Can you get to sleep to-night?"

"Is it likely?" returned Sybil, bashing her pillow about. "I'm fed up, I tell you!"

"Then what about getting up, and making a cup of tea?" Clarice suggested gleefully. "A cigarette, too—eh, girls?"

"Topping notion!" declared Phyllis Franklin. "I'm game! How about Olive? You asleep, Olive dear?"

"Oo, noo!"

"That settles it! Carried unanimously!" tittered Clarice, rising softly in her bed. "We've plenty of methylated, I know, in the secret locker. We'll have quite a little midnight spree!"

Ruby was hearing all this as she still lay with her face to the wall, and with sleep mercifully coming upon her at last.

In spite of the chatter, she was more inclined to fall asleep to-night than she had been any other night for weeks past.

Hours and hours of sleep were owing to her, the girl whose conscience had been troubling her so badly. Now, although she was not at peace with all the world, she was at least at peace with herself, and she felt sinking into that heavy slumber which would mean forgetfulness for a little while.

"What about the washerwoman's daughter?" asked Sybil, slipping on her costly dressing-gown.

"Oh, leave her alone in her glory!" was Clarice's flippant answer.

Clarice was over at the locker by now, and in the darkness her voice could soon be heard telling off the things she was taking from the secret larder.

"Tea—sugar—tinned milk. Some biscuits; that's good! And here is our priceless outfit—"

"The spirit-stove and kettle which we were to be sure and never use indoors. He, he he!" tittered Sybil. "Do you remember buying that stove in London, Clarice, and how the counter Johnny warned us to be careful?"

"Yes; but don't talk so loud," put in Phyllis. "We don't want to bring along old Trotters!"

"Oo, noo!" said Olive. "Besides, pree remember pooh Rooby!"

"I'll give her 'poor Ruby,' if she tells tales in the morning to the new captain!" muttered Sybil darkly.

Then the four's activities put a check upon all talk.

Still without any light, except such as a starry sky imparted when one of two window-blinds had been drawn up, they set the spirit-stove on the floor, and primed it with methylated spirit from a big bottle.

Then they filled the squat kettle with water from a couple of water-bottles, and put it on to boil.

Some teacups and saucers were quietly produced and set upon a chair. The biscuit-tin was opened, and so was a tin of cigarettes.

Sybil took a cigarette at once, and lit up, the others following suit. A stolen

smoke seemed just the way to pass the interval of waiting for the kettle to boil.

A chuckle came from Clarice.

"Just fancy, if old Trotters suddenly walked in and—"

"Hark!"

It was a whisper of dismay from Phyllis.

All four girls sprang to their stockinged feet, dropping their pinched-out cigarettes to the carpet.

More than this they could not do, however, before the door, which they had not dared to lock, slowly opened!

"Miss Trotter? No, thank goodness! the guilty four were saying to themselves in the next moment; only some prowling girl from the other dormitory.

Sybil took a swift, challenging stride across the dark room.

She quite expected to find that the intruder was Elsie Dainton, taking upon herself, as captain, to pry. But it was not Elsie who advanced into the room.

The girl was Joan Haviland!

As the bluish flame of the spirit-stove lit up the scene for her, she came to a startled stop.

Then she seemed to think of turning back to her own dormitory, without a word; but Sybil pounced, and held her fast.

"No, you don't!" Sybil hissed, dragging Joan violently away from the door. "Shut it, Clarice; that's right. It's the scholarship kid!"

The words were spoken fiercely yet softly. And over there, in her far corner of the long room, Ruby Haviland never moved. Fast asleep now, it would take louder talk than this to wake her.

"The scholarship kid? Well, I declare!" Clarice said, coming away from the closed door. "What with one and another of these Haviland girls, we are to have no peace at all!"

"We will have our bit of a spree before this kid goes back to her bed," Sybil declared vehemently. "Spy!"

"I am no spy!" Joan answered in a fierce whisper. "I only came in here because I thought my sister might be lying awake, miserable!"

"Well, she happens to be asleep—see?" sneered Sybil. "And we happen to be making ourselves a nice cup of tea. There won't be one for you."

"I don't want any of your tea. Let me go!"

"Not a bit of it! We are not going to have you dodging back to wake up your precious captain! Here you are, and here you stay until— Oh, look out, Clarice! Hold her!"

"I've got her!" chuckled Clarice.

But she was a trifle too sure.

Joan, falling into Clarice's hands the moment she tore herself free from Sybil, was struggling desperately to escape.

With a wrench, she got away from Clarice, only to be again swooped upon by Sybil.

Then Joan resumed her struggles, pulling Sybil all over the room. Clarice, Phyllis, and Olive joined in the tussle, and in the resulting confusion a terrible thing happened.

The spirit-stove was suddenly overturned!

Over went the big bottle of "methylated," too, and it was uncorked at the time.

The spreading pool of spirit on the carpet took fire in a flash.

Even before the scuffling girls had come to a standstill, the bluish flames were all over the floor!

"My goodness, look! Oh, what have we done?" gasped Sybil.

themselves, or raising an alarm. They could do neither, for, coupled to all the paralysing horror of the conflagration, there was the guilty thought they had caused the fire!

Suddenly Phyllis Franklin clutched hold of Sybil.

"What about the others?" was Phyllis' frantic whisper. "Ruby—she is asleep—"

"No; here she comes!"

Ruby had woke up at last.

She had opened her eyes to find the room on fire.

There were flames spreading all over the floor and up the walls, for the burning pool of methylated spirit had rushed this way and that, setting fire to curtains and other hangings.

All this Ruby had seen in a flash as she opened her eyes. What she did not see, however, as she leapt from her bed and rushed across to the door, was the senseless form of her own sister.

Now she came blundering forth from

from Sybil and her equally panic-stricken cries as they went tearing down through the house.

"Who is that—you, Ruby?" cried Elsie Dainton, one of the first to leap out of bed and rush towards the girl in the doorway. "Where is the fire, Ruby? Not up here?"

"Yes! In the dormitory annexe!"

"What!"

"All right, girls! Keep calm!" Elsie appealed to the girls who had cried out in horror. "Plenty of time!"

"Yes, it's all right!" Ruby panted. "I've shut the door of the burning room, and that will hold the fire in check! Elsie, what about the fire buckets? Perhaps we can get to work before—"

"Half a sec.," Elsie said calmly.

She darted into the passage and listened outside the closed door of the burning room.

"No," she came back to say decisively.

"We'd better not open that door to try and put the flames out with buckets. It has got too big a hold!"

"But—"

"Downstairs, all! We shall only be in the way of people who want to use the hydrant! Now, girls, keep calm!"

"All right, Elsie!" some of them shouted cheerily. "Steady the Fifth!"

"That's the style!" Elsie cried out, almost gaily, as she saw the half-dressed girls flitting by, in no panic whatever, to the passage. "Go along, too, Ruby!"

"I'm waiting for Joan!" Ruby exclaimed, peering about her in the darkness. "Joan—Joan!"

No answer.

"She has gone with the others already—must have gone!" said Elsie. "Now, Ruby dear, come along! You and I are the only ones left, so it's time we flitted!"

Saying this, the new Form captain sprinted from the room, so as to be with the rest of the girls as they made their more or less orderly scamper from the threatened part of the building.

She quite thought Ruby would follow, step for step; but an awful uncertainty had seized that girl.

Was Joan really gone with the rest of the Fifth Form? Strange that her sister had not rushed up to her a few moments since, so that they might face any peril close together!

Ruby hurried from the deserted dormitory at last, and now, as she passed by the closed door of the burning room, she heard the hiss and roar of the fire.

It was a furnace in there, but she felt thankful there was no one the least bit imperilled.

Then, suddenly, above all the hurly-burly from the thronged staircases, Ruby heard a dozen voices raising the anxious cry:

"Where is Joan? Joan Haviland—where is she?"

Ruby stood stock still.

"There's one girl missing!" the wild cries sounded again. "Joan Haviland—Joan Haviland, answer!"

But the answer did not come.

Instead, from somewhere still farther down the congested staircase, several voices that were shrill with panic suddenly rose above the din.

"She is in the room that is on fire! Quick—quick! Save her, some of you up there! Joan was in the room, but we forgot her. Oh, quick—quick! Save her!"

Ruby heard. She turned back, and, even as she did so, there seemed to come to her from the fiery room a faint scream—only one.

She dashed to the closed door, turned the knob, and expected to whirl inside. To her horror, however, the door resisted her, as if it was being held shut against her!



Out of the licking flames and suffocating smoke tottered Ruby with the helpless Joan in her arms, and with her half-blinded eyes saw a friend to help her—Elsie Dainton.

Sybil and her cronies were shrinking in terror from the fire. But not so Joan.

With wonderful presence of mind that girl cast about her for something with which to smother the fire. She saw the nearest bed, and made a rush to snatch at the coverings; and then, as ill-luck had it, she tripped on the ruffled carpet and fell headlong.

Not a sound came from Joan after the dull thud of her fall. Her head had struck a bedpost, and she was lying there, completely stunned.

"What shall we do? Oh, the whole room is catching!" panted Sybil, wringing her hands in a panic. "Clarice—Olive—Phyllis! Do something!"

"Shout for help!" jerked out Phyllis.

"No, shut up! Come away!" was Clarice's panicky suggestion. "My goodness, the flames nearly caught me! Did you see?"

Olive was already rushing to the door. Clarice ran after her, and then Sybil and Phyllis followed.

Out into the passage they fluttered, utterly panic stricken. They knew that they ought to be either fighting the fire

the fiery room, to find Sybil and the other three greatly off their heads with dismay.

"Sybil—Clarice! Oh, thank goodness you are all here! How did it happen?" panted Ruby. "Have you raised the alarm? I was asleep. I've only been awake a moment. Tell me!"

"We haven't given the alarm yet," quavered Sybil. "I—we—"

"Then shout out now!" Ruby cried, at the same time pulling the door shut. "Shout 'Fire, fire!'"

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" screamed all four girls then. "Help! Fire! Help!"

The Ordeal by Fire!

IN the Fifth Form dormitory on the opposite side of the passage, startled sleepers were suddenly lifting their heads from the pillows.

"Hark! Did someone call?"

"Fire, fire! Help!"

The door of the Fifth Form dormitory crashed open. A girl came rushing in.

"Get up quick! You will be all right if you keep cool and get out of this quietly. But—"

"Fire, fire!" came the far-off yell

Then she understood. The heat of the fire was forcing the door shut. She pushed frantically, and then it flew open and crashed round against the wall, whilst the flames instantly flared towards the opening.

They drove Ruby back for a second; but in the next instant she had a muffler about her mouth and nostrils and was going right into the fiery room, regardless of the searing heat and the choking fumes.

One resolute plunge up the right-hand side of the room left her almost stumbling headlong over her helpless sister.

Joan had swooned again, after one moment of consciousness during which she had voiced that half-stilled scream.

How she did it Ruby never knew, but somehow she got her arms about the lifeless form and lifted it.

Whilst she was doing this the windows blew out with the force of the fire, sending fragments of glass tinkling to the ground. And then the whole room seemed to become a furnace at white heat.

Yet the girl's sublime resolve was unshaken. Not all the terrors of the fire—smoke, flame, and heat combined—should send her rushing back into safety, leaving Joan behind.

Either she must save her sister, or perish in the attempt! Clasp the limp form in her arms, she turned round to struggle back; and then she almost lost her balance. What with the giddiness and the weight of Joan, the staggering movement had nearly proved too much.

A heave and a gasp, then a few tottering steps, with the flames seeming to dance around her. The door—where was the door? Oh, the blinding smoke, the heat, and her giddiness were getting worse every moment.

Crash! She fell to the ground suddenly, with poor, senseless Joan beneath her. But she struggled up again.

Once more, when she might have made a blundering rush to safety unencumbered by that human burden, she stayed to raise it in her arms!

Then she made a blind, tottering run to where she thought the door must be, carrying Joan all the way.

The muffler slipped from about her mouth and nostrils. One moment more inside the fiery room, and she would have crashed to the floor again, as senseless as her sister.

But she breathed a sigh of thankfulness! She had found the doorway. Through it she staggered, licked at by the flames. And out here, amidst all the belching smoke, there was a friend to help her.

With her half-blinded eyes she saw Elsie, just on the point of making a dash into the room.

Ruby tumbled helplessly into that girl's arms, still clasping Joan in her own. And then the lurid glow around her changed to the blackness of an awful void, and she knew no more.

A starry sky was the first thing Ruby saw when at last her eyes flickered open.

She was lying in the open air, with something beneath her as soft as a feather bed. She was all wrapped up, too, so that only her face felt the cool night breeze.

"Ruby—oh, that is better! You are going to be all right now!" some voice exclaimed in joyful relief.

(Continued on page 24.)

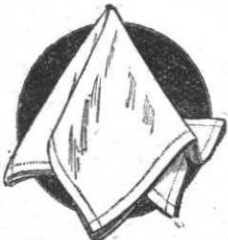
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JOAN HAVILAND'S SILENCE!

(Continued from page 23.)

Then Ruby realised that she was the centre of a hushed, anxious crowd of people. There were girls—lots of girls—and there was a mistress, too.

Miss Chessingham, the school's own headmistress, was here!

"Lie still, dear," the Head murmured, kneeling to speak soothingly. "In a minute we shall be taking you away; but don't be afraid, you are not hurt."

"I hope I am never going to be afraid of anything again," was Ruby's feeble whisper. "Miss Chessingham, tell me. How is Joan—Joan, my sister?"

"Safe, unharmed, Ruby dear, thanks to your wonderful courage. Oh, my dear, my dear," Miss Chessingham said, the tears streaming down her cheeks, such was the emotion she felt, "how brave you were! What a credit to Greyhurst!"

"Did I— Do you really mean that?" Ruby whispered eagerly. "Don't think I want to be told such things, so as to brag." "It is only that I— Oh, I did so want a chance, and it seems to have come already!"

"A chance, my child?"
"A chance to make good in the eyes of all the school," Ruby exclaimed, with intense feeling. "The girls know, Miss Chessingham, even if you don't. I have not been a credit to anybody in the past! But I really was sorry, and I was longing for the chance to wipe away the disgrace—the shame! And now—"

Her eyes were closing again. Miss Chessingham bent over to catch what was coming so faintly from those faltering lips.

"I can face mother after this," Ruby was saying, as if speaking to herself. "I can face all the school now, because I have done a thing—one thing, at least—the weak voice trailed off into a quivering sigh." Miss Chessingham bent lower still and kissed the silent lips.

She knew that Ruby had found a happiness she had never known before!

Farewell to Many Friends!

NEXT morning did not find Joan and Ruby going down to mother in the village, after all.

On the contrary, it was mother who came up to the school, and there is no need to state the reason why.

Quite uninjured though they were after the ordeal by fire, the sisters were confined to the sanatorium.

The fire had never got beyond the room in which it started. Thanks to prompt and brilliant work with the byrants, within half an hour of Ruby's rescuing of Joan the flames had been extinguished.

There had been a full inquiry into the cause of the outbreak, and as a result four girls were, in the course of the next few hours, to quit Greyhurst for ever!

Yes, it had come to that at last. Sybil Sardone was under orders to leave at once.

And with her in her well-deserved disgrace was Clarice Choane, Phyllis Franklin, and Olive Courtney.

"Good riddance!" was the terse comment on the clearing out of the Fifth Form's "swell set."

Joan and her cousin Elsie; Hilda Heathcote, so true a friend to them both, from the very first; Joyce of the bobbed hair, and Evelyn Gray; Ruby, too—the new Ruby! How much harder is it to say good-bye to these girls!

Let us go forward in a single line

of print, to one golden hour of a certain Wednesday "halfer" in the summer term.

It is full four months since the Fifth Form at Greyhurst saw the last of its "swell set."

There has been some rare fun and sport to-day down on the great field that is now basking in the sunshine. The Fifth Form have met the Sixth at cricket, and the Fifth have won!

For most of our old chums of Greyhurst there is a dainty table spread by Hilda Heathcote.

Hilda needs to take time, too, about all that she does these days, for she is still far from being the Hilda Heathcote of the old athletic days, when she was captain of the Fifth.

But she makes light of any disability that still troubles her, as the after effect of that heroic deed performed on Founder's Day.

Now she is standing at the open study window, watching the dispersing crowd in the cricket-field.

"Here we are, girls!" says Joyce of the bobbed hair, coming into the study with all the freedom of intimate friendship.

Under Joyce's arm is her old violin. She cannot even set it aside for the minute without passing the bow across it's strings just twice or thrice lovingly.

"So we won, they tell me!" Joyce says delightedly, joining Hilda by the window. "And fancy our Joan knocking up twenty runs! Bravo, the Fifth!"

"I was there up to the last over or so," Hilda remarks, still with her steady eyes upon the scattering crowd. "You should have seen the match, Joyce! It was worth anybody's while—"

"Don't I know it?" breaks in Joyce. She made a rueful grimace. "But, there, you know how I was placed! The Fifth Form is greedy for glory. It not only meant to beat the Sixth at cricket, but decided that we must also beat the Sixth at the school concert on Saturday. So, being a duffer at cricket—"

"And the best violinist in the school I—"

"Oh rats! All I know is, I've been trying over that symphony for two hours on end," says Joyce. "And if I'm not as thirsty as any cricketer—well!"

"You shall have your cup in a minute, Joyce! They are all coming now. There's Elsie Dainton," Hilda says, waving from the window. "And do you see Joan and Ruby, walking with their mother?"

At this instant the study door opens again, causing Hilda and Joyce to face round.

"Did somebody say 'tea'?" questions Evelyn Gray, flopping into an easy-chair. "Pouf! I wonder they didn't have to carry me here! But we won!"

"And you got how many runs?" asked Joyce, drifting back to her violin.

"A miserable one!" grimaces Evelyn. "Still, who cares, so long as the Form did well as a whole? I say, Hilda, have you laid a place for Mrs. Haviland?"

"Oh, yes!" says Hilda placidly.

"Isn't it grand, girls, Evelyn pursues, "to see Mrs. Haviland so utterly different from what she used to be? I don't mean the different clothes—both clothes. What I do mean is—"

"I know," nods Hilda. "Nothing of the anxious look now, none of that weariness she used to show, as if she often worked until she was dropping. Yes, it's fine!"

"Wonderful!" chimes in Joyce, sitting down, fiddle in hand. "No more

poverty for Mrs. Haviland after this! Nor for Elsie Dainton, either! Why, the money Elsie's father cabled to England for all of them a month ago was a sort of fortune in itself!"

"It may be wrong of me, but I don't think it is," says Evelyn; "I can't help feeling there is a sort of dramatic justice in the way things have worked out. Elsie's father is as rich as ever he was in the old days before Mr. Sardone ruined him. And now it is Mr. Sardone—Sybil's own father—who is ruined!"

"Shall I tell you something?" says Joyce, thrumming the violin-strings. "Elsie Dainton had a letter from Sybil Sardone yesterday."

"Oh!"
"Elsie showed me the letter. It was—well, it was a pretty awful whine for help!"

"And did Elsie—"
"She did," says Joyce. "Twenty pounds. I am not supposed to know, and don't you ever tell Elsie that I told you, or I'm done for in her eyes! But she sent Sybil twenty pounds, and—"

"Sh! Here is Elsie, coming along the passage, with the others!" cautions Evelyn, looking towards the door.

It opens with a high-spirited crash, and first over the threshold dashes Joan, crying:

"We won—we won! And, please, Hilda, I think you said that mother was to come to tea?"

"I think Mrs. Haviland knows she would be welcome, whether I said it or not," replies Hilda, taking a slow step to welcome the smiling widow with outstretched hand.

"Yes, come in—come in all!" is Hilda's cordial cry to all the rest of the invited guests, swarming at the open door. "Elsie—"

"Yes, Hilda?"
"Will you pour out for me? I feel too lazy!"

So Hilda accounts for her desire to appoint a deputy hostess; but laziness is not the true reason, and her chums know it.

"Next to me, mother!" cries Ruby eagerly. "Between me and Joan!"

They are all fast settling into their places at the table, when Elsie finds that Joyce is still loitering in her dim corner, softly playing the violin.

"Joyce, are you going to sit up, or will you have it there? asks Elsie.
"Oh, don't mind me! I'll have it here, please!" Joyce answers.

The teacups begin to make their cheerful clatter. Talk and laughter fill the crowded study.

Joyce, having sipped her cup, cuddles the violin under her chin again, and plays on dreamily, her large dark eyes more often than not dwelling upon Joan and Ruby and their mother.

She is thinking of one girl as she is to-day—so full of loving care for others, most of all for her mother and sister, so happy in herself, so popular with all the Form.

Joyce is thinking, too, of what that same girl used to be, in the days now far behind.

"Changed indeed!" thinks Joyce. "What a changed and better Ruby is here, from the one we knew in the old days of Joan Haviland's Silence!"

THE END.

(A great new serial begins in the SCHOOL FRIEND the week after next, whilst next week a splendid, long complete story of the girls of Dunesford Hall appears. Place a standing order with your newsagent without delay.)